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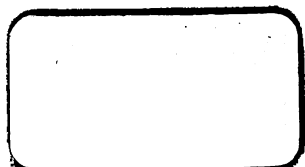


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BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

MAUDE BARFORD WARREN

KD 13351



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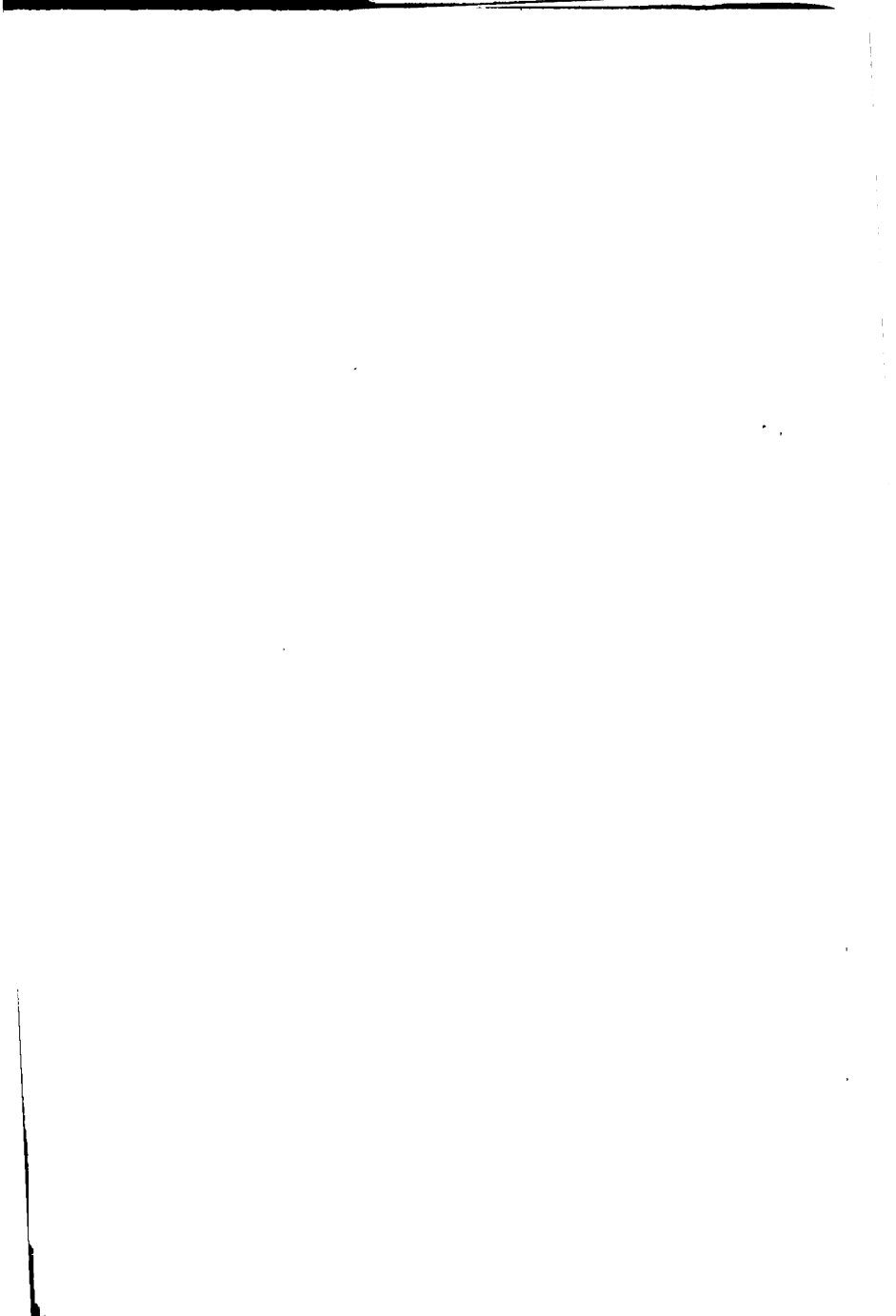
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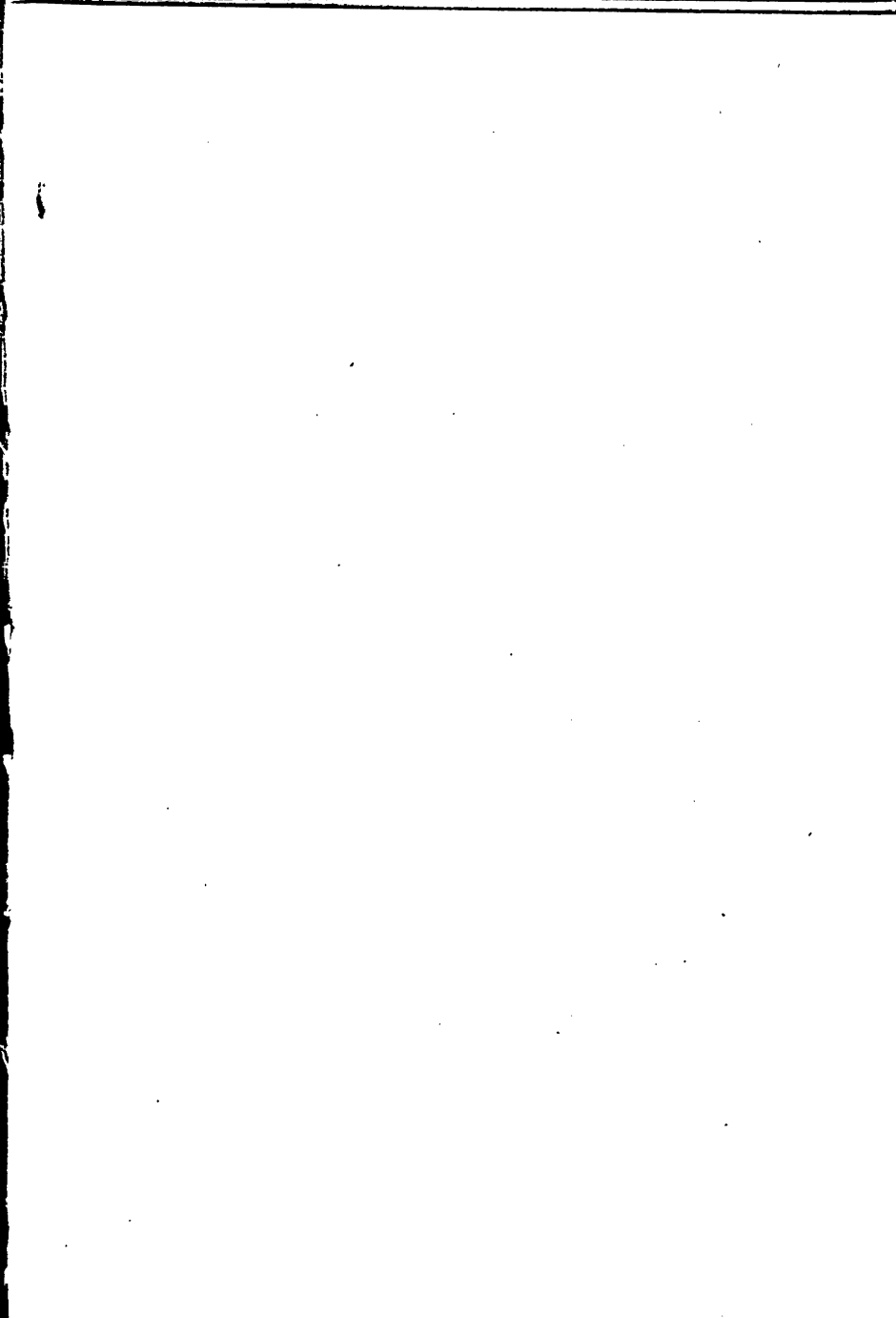




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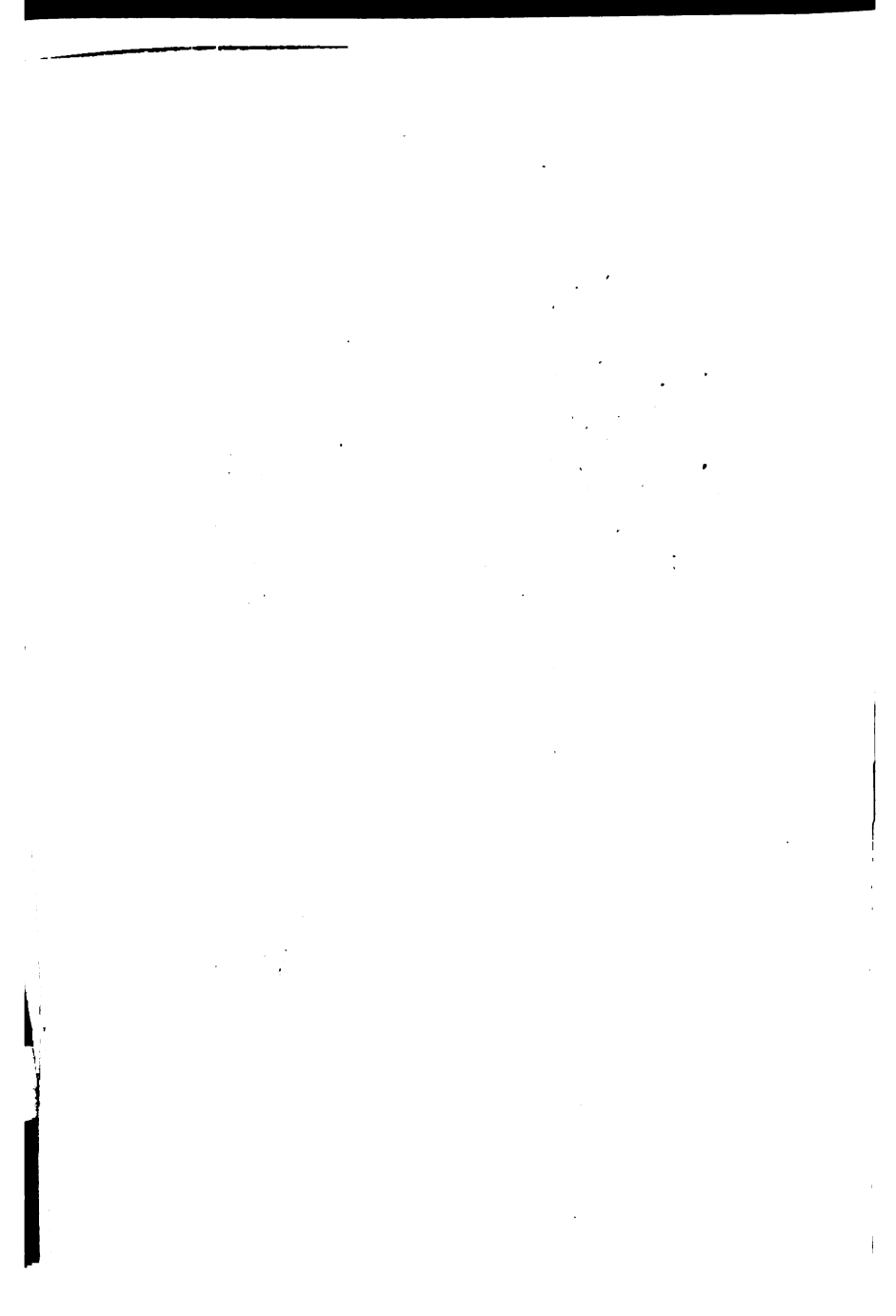
BARBARA NOTED WHERE THE TWO OR THREE GIRLS WHO WERE PRESENT
WERE STANDING, AND THREW THE BOUQUET IN THEIR DIRECTION

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

A NOVEL
BY
S. MORTIMER JOHNSON
WITH ILLUSTRATIONS
BY J. C. HARRIS



HARPER & BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS
NEW YORK AND LONDON
MCMXV



BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

. A NOVEL

BY
MAUDE RADFORD WARREN

AUTHOR OF
"THE LAND OF THE LIVING"
"PETER, PETER" ETC.



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A-2

TO
MY MOTHER

CONTENTS

PART I—GRASSMERE

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	BARBARA LOSES AN ACQUAINTANCE	3
II.	THE OPEN DOOR	15
III.	ENGAGED	27
IV.	A WAY OUT	40
V.	MARRIED	50
VI.	FREEDOM	60

PART II—STARS

VII.	LOVERS	75
VIII.	A RESPITE	89
IX.	THE HEIGHTS	104
X.	THE APPROACH TO THE STARS	117
XI.	A MIRAGE	131
XII.	THE STARS	146
XIII.	MERIDIAN	159

PART III—FALSE DAWN

XIV.	THE LETTER	175
XV.	HOME AGAIN	187
XVI.	A RETURN	200
XVII.	THE VERDICT	214
XVIII.	FREEDOM ONCE MORE	227

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
XIX.	INTIMATIONS	244
XX.	TWILIGHT	259
XXI.	THE MARRIAGE	272
XXII.	THE LOSS	283
XXIII.	THE CLINGING WIFE	293
XXIV.	AN END AND A BEGINNING	305

PART IV—PAY

XXV.	TRUSTING THE FUTURE	317
XXVI.	GILBERT LANGWORTHY	328
XXVII.	A STRUGGLE	336
XXVIII.	HOME	346

Part I
GRASSMERE



BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

I

BARBARA LOSES AN ACQUAINTANCE

BARBARA LANGWORTHY closed the front door softly after her and hurried down the long drive, sick and ashamed after the scene with Anita, her brother's wife. She could still see Anita's slightly raised upper lip, distended nostrils, and angry eyes; she could hear her thin, ugly voice saying those bitter words about dependent relations. It was a scene that was repeated with increasing frequency, and at every repetition Barbara more overwhelmingly felt the sting of her own helplessness.

As she neared the gate she met her brother. Gilbert Langworthy carried his heavy bulk in a deprecating way; his light-blue eyes were apologetic when they were not indifferent. For all that his years were only thirty-five he had an old man's spirit. He had sold himself to a moderately well-to-do woman, half-a-score years his senior, because she had bought in Grassmere, the old home of his people, because she wanted him, and because he hadn't considered himself any too fine a bargain for any woman. His soul was perishing from dry-rot, and the one thing that survived in him was a passive affection for his only sister,

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

Barbara was passing him with averted eyes when he stopped her with a fat hand on her arm.

"She's not very well, you know," he said; "we both must remember that. I reckon there wasn't a finer woman in Virginia when she was in health than she was. And she certainly has kept up the place well."

Gilbert's air implied that while Anita had not exactly made the world, yet she had rearranged it in a very creditable fashion for the benefit of the Langworthys. Barbara nodded and summoned up a smile; then she passed him and went on down the long driveway with swimming eyes and quick-stirring breast. She had stepped into a world of beauty, for October is the queen month of the seasons in Virginia. In the rose-garden beyond the drive the last of the roses were blooming with all the beauty of the spring and with a keener fragrance, as if to make the most of their brief future. Above Barbara's brown head the autumn had built a gorgeous canopy of scarlet and golden leaves. The afternoon light suffused earth and sky with a mellow radiance, vibrating in the infinite space between, making the near shadows seem almost transparent, giving a gracious blur to far-off hedges and angles. The air was stimulating and yet subtly languorous, bidding to action, but to dreams, too.

Yet Barbara saw and felt nothing; she was a vessel of surging emotions, all her being reacting passionately against her dependence, against the long, hopeless monotony of her days. As she walked on her feelings were so keen that the very earth felt hot to her feet, the sunlight seemed to sting maliciously into her smarting eyes. She put her hands in front of them for a few moments; then she turned her face of young shame and misery toward the Blue Ridge Mountains, shouldering together in huddled, cool, purple beauty. From in front of the gate of Grassmere, straight into the mountains, stretched a long, dark-red road. She sat on a fallen sycamore by

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

the side of the gate and clenched her thin hands together.

"I can't stand it," she said aloud; "the awful, deadly weariness of the days, with nothing ever happening—never, never."

She thought with throbbing distaste of the bedroom Anita had furnished for her, staring yellow curtains at the windows, yellow valances over the bed, cold, damp-eaten steel-engravings on the wall, and a hideous carpet that Barbara had seen as a child on the floor of the sick-room of Anita's mother; she had put into it her child's horror of the dying woman, and she had never trodden it since without remembrance. That bedroom was as alien to her as was the sitting-room where she sat between Gilbert and Anita in the evenings, waiting for the release of bedtime. Grassmere had not felt like home since Anita had brought it back to Gilbert.

"Nothing but this road has any life," Barbara thought, with passionate resentment. "Nothing happens in any of these dull houses that all the young people leave! There's not a hope or a story in the whole place!"

Barbara was too young at eighteen to realize that stories were being lived in every house within her range of vision. She could not recognize comedy or tragedy in the guise of what was real or familiar; to appeal to her untutored experience it would have had to be clothed in the obvious and conventional trappings of romance. In the little Hare house, almost opposite, lived a thin-lipped old wife who had reformed her husband from drink by drinking harder than he did; she had endured a double martyrdom for them both, and now shrank behind her white window-curtains, ashamed to meet any one face to face. Across the red-gullied hill lived an old Englishman who in his youth had married a barmaid and had been sequestered in Virginia by his relatives; he was always going home next year, but in his heart he knew he would never make the journey. There was Stephen Thornton's

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

old uncle, who belonged to a dissenting faith, told the Lord every Sunday what to do, and grew excited and miserable when he talked to any one who argued that there is no hell. There was the Honorable Sophia Langrel, a baron's daughter, married to Stephen Thornton's cousin, who had disgraced her. She gave French lessons, but she instructed her pupils from behind a screen, not because she was ashamed, as poor old Mrs. Hare was, but because she was too indifferent to wish to have human relations with the world. Barbara never even reflected as to the experience which lay behind her own brother Gilbert's nightly remark, delivered half seriously, half humorously, as he locked up the house:

"Well, thank God, another day over without much bad luck—at least, without any we can't stand."

Barbara, looking about her with miserable, slow glance, did not understand that she lived in a countryside that was rich in life. There were the older Southern people who had grown dulled in the tame years that had followed the war. She felt nothing of the retrospective drama of their lives. There were the many English people outnumbering the Southerners, who had come over to catch up on their incomes, or because they had not money enough to live as they wished to at home, or because they had been rusticated by their families. These aliens were all on intimate terms, though they were quite likely to say to the Southerners that in London they could not know one another. She did not guess that their fuller lives lay behind them as truly as the lives of those whose young hope and energy had gone into the war. There was a reckless set, composed of certain members of good old families, who drank and gambled, and imported men for their dances from Richmond and the North, and whose social doings were mentioned in the New York papers. She did not know that her own thirst for life was only a little less strong than theirs, and lacked their opportunity for gratification. She supposed that their only connection

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

with her lay in the fact that they joined with the more conservative Southerners in horse-racing and in a hunt club, and in the winter made for her a gay procession along the red road of high-stepping horses, smart habits, and pink coats.

But Barbara was outside all this pageantry, in a hostile little world that no pretense could make tolerable, and with no escape except a short daily walk along the red road, when she unleashed her imagination and saw what her life might be if she could ever follow those who journeyed along it, and come to some free place beyond the mountains. Sometimes she felt that she would have changed lots with almost any one who passed.

As she sat with drooping shoulders and sad eyes she heard the first of the travelers. An old negro approached; while he was still well behind her Barbara could tell by the peculiar shuffle of his feet what his race was, and she knew that a little punctuating "plop-plop" meant that he was followed by a small dog. He came into view, a bowed old man, who made a slow, wide detour as he passed her, to show his respect for a member of the ruling race. The dog was a black, bow-legged creature, who popped ahead with an amusing effect of fussy efficiency. Barbara stared after them resentfully; even they were free. Then she heard a rattle of harsh wheels. Again without turning her head she knew that those who were coming were "second-class" people. They rolled by, bouncing on the rough seat of their wagon, a farmer and his wife who had been to town. The woman was wearing her new autumn hat, and her bow to Barbara was stiff because of her mixture of self-consciousness and pride. Perched on the tail-board of the wagon were two school-boys, their tin dinner-pails rattling with the nuts which they had loitered to gather. Their satisfied smiles told Barbara that this happy lift would get them home in time for their evening work without the necessity for manufacturing excuses to meet inconvenient domestic inquiry. Barbara was able

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

to read very clearly the fine print of the daily history of the road.

A softer rumble of wheels came next. Reckoning by the hour of the day, Barbara judged that Mrs. Langrel was passing on her usual drive. She was a tall, tragic-faced woman, dressed in black, and she drove looking straight ahead, oblivious of Barbara. By her side sat a little red-lipped, black-browed child, her distant cousin, little Mary Thornton. Barbara never saw Mrs. Langrel without pity for her shattered life. The husband that had disgraced her had long since gone away, pensioned off, gossip said, on condition that he would never come back. But her greater tragedy lay in the loss of her son. Barbara had played with him in her nursery days. When he was still a lad and the neighborhood was yet speculating as to whether he would be his mother's child or his father's, he had run away to sea. Much later word had come to Mrs. Langrel that he had died, and from that day forward she had worn black and had spoken to almost no one except Stephen Thornton and the little child Mary. Barbara had to admit to herself that she preferred her lot to that of poor Mrs. Langrel.

There sounded presently on the red road the steady, quick pace of a man walking. Barbara sat a little more erect. She knew the step—Stephen Thornton's. In a moment he would flash by with only a rapid lift of his hat and a gleaming smile in her direction. Even as she saw the picture of him in her mind's eye she saw the reality. Thornton was a tall, brown young man, with a good figure, a thoughtful but eager face, and an absent manner. His elder neighbors had toward him something of a critical attitude because he had been designed for the profession of medicine, and when he was a year from graduation, his father dying, he had entered law-school. His simple explanation that he preferred the law to medicine, and had only kept on at the latter to please his father, was considered insufficient; it was thought ex-

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

travagant of him to have spent so much money studying for one profession when his bent was toward another. Anita Langworthy, who was his cousin, defended him, acridly stating that it was not Stephen's fault that his father did not die two years earlier, and that the money he had wasted would have been his own sooner or later. Thornton had finished law-school a year or two before, and was trying to work up a practice in Charlottesville. He had found himself handicapped by the attitude of his neighbors toward him; as Anita said, they persisted in considering him a doctor rather than a lawyer. But Thornton insisted on success, and sat day after day in his empty office, walking in and out from his uncle's home, where he lived, because he could not afford a horse and because the train did not always run to suit him. Barbara as a child had known him well, but now he had no eyes for any one; he cared for nothing but a career. Barbara thought he must have all the energy of a Yankee. When he had passed she watched his brown figure turning to black, and dwindling, and at last blurring into a little still blot on the horizon.

The tears sprang into Barbara's eyes.

"He might have stopped for a word. Nobody cares, and anybody ought to know how lonely I am," she said, with self-pity.

She had all the seething protest of youth, opposed by some inexorable condition, and with all the inexperience of youth she did not believe that condition could ever be changed. Again her tears flowed, and she made no effort to check them; for the road was empty, and there was silence except for the suppressed animal and insect life in the grass at her feet. Then she hastily dried her eyes, for she heard the soft thud of hoofs coming along the side-road, and, looking up, she saw Leonard Hare riding on a livery hack. Beside him, on Bayonne, a horse which Gilbert had given her, and which Anita had recently sold to Leonard Hare, rode a large young woman, who sat

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

badly, while just behind came a tall, thin, elderly man on another livery hack.

"The rich Northerners," Barbara thought.

Her tone held a shade of contempt for them, not because they were rich or because they were Northerners, but because of the combination. Then her feeling changed to a hot, resentful envy of them and of Leonard Hare. The Northerners had money; they could ride to any quarter of the world they chose and command adventure. Barbara, with a bitter droop upon her lips, watched the large young woman's attempt to preserve on horseback the assurance which was certainly hers when she walked. She left the saddle with reluctance at each trot, but leaving it she disclosed a gap which took in a wide slice of the horizon.

Hare bowed deeply; the young woman cast at Barbara a quick, unseeing glance, and would have ridden on but for Bayonne. He recognized Barbara, whom he loved, and, disregarding the hands on his reins, he went to his former mistress and tried clumsily to put his head against her shoulder. At the caress Barbara's tears rose again.

"Miss Streeter," Hare said, with the elaborate voice and manner which always slightly amused Barbara, "let me present to you Miss Barbara Langworthy, who used to own Bayonne."

"Oh, how do you do?" Miss Streeter said. "I wonder if Bayonne will ever like me as much? You see, I don't know how to feed him lumps of sugar; I'm always afraid he'll bite."

Barbara, struggling for self-control, surveyed Miss Streeter, who had the blondness and calm that seemed to go with her size. Barbara thought that she looked as if she could fit circumstances to herself or fit herself to them with equal ease. A grudging sister-in-law would not blight her. But then, rich girls didn't ever have to be blighted. As Barbara laid her cheek against Bayonne's neck she felt an unworthy pleasure in the reflection that

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

Miss Streeter was not the sort who could ever understand a horse.

"Bayonne doesn't like sugar, but he certainly does enjoy apples," she murmured in her sweet, drawling voice.

"We ought to ride on, Lucia," said the elderly man, who was having difficulty in holding in his horse.

He tried to lift his hat to Barbara, and then gave it up. Barbara stepped away from Bayonne, who yielded to a determined flick of Lucia Streeter's whip. Barbara bowed gravely and stood looking after the riders.

"I reckon poor Bayonne would be lonely with her," she sighed. "I do hope Leonard Hare hasn't sold him to her."

She began to walk away from Grassmere, stopping once to fasten a spray of scarlet leaves at her throat. They lent a fictitious color to her pale face and contrasted well with her light-brown hair. As she went she considered the rise of Leonard Hare. A dozen years ago, she thought, any one would have said that her lot in life was infinitely better than his. She was the youngest of the Langworthys, a family whose members for two hundred and fifty years had written their names in large hand in the political and social annals of Virginia. For all their losses they were still well-to-do and able to give largess to their poorer neighbors. Among these were the Hares, little better than poor whites. Colonel Langworthy had been attracted by handsome little Leonard Hare, and had allowed him to study with the tutor of his own boys. Before long there was no intellectual difference between young Hare and the young Langworthys, but there had always been a social difference.

Twelve years had seen the death of the colonel and his wife and four of their sons and the loss of their property. There were left only Gilbert and herself, living on the bounty of Anita. But little Leonard Hare had gone up in the world. After he had left the Langworthy school-room he had worked his way through college. He was a

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

doctor now and had come back to practise in his own county. Once he had called on the Langworthys, but Anita's manner had been such that he had not repeated the experiment. Anita said frankly that she simply would not have second-rate people in her house and that she was no follower of new-fangled social democracy.

Again Barbara heard hoof-beats behind her. She did not turn, but she knew Leonard Hare was coming back. He dismounted and asked:

"Miss Barbara, may I walk a little way with you?"

Barbara nodded. She liked to look at Hare. She saw very few people, and none with a face so handsome as his. Her brother Gilbert and Anita both had weak chins, but Hare's chin was clean-cut and rounded and strong as a granite boulder. Her brother and sister were short-sighted and inert of eye, but Hare's splendid hazel eyes looked out on the world with alertness and grasp. There was a sort of pleasant luster over his face, an atmosphere of amiability about him that charmed the lonely girl, depressed by the dullness of her immediate human environment.

"Have you sold Bayonne to those rich Northerners?" she asked.

"Yes; Miss Streeter needed a well-broken horse. She'll be good to him."

"Will she take him North?" sighed Barbara.

"She'll take him Northwest," said Hare, a hint of suppressed excitement in his tone.

Barbara looked a question, and he went on:

"Miss Barbara, I'm going away from here. Mr. Streeter, as you know, has been right sick, and I've been attending him. He wants me to go with him to Pasadena. He says he'll set me up there. So I'm off with them on Monday."

Barbara felt a surge of jealousy that life could give Leonard Hare so much and was passing her by. Then she felt a vague disappointment at losing him. It had

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

been a break in her monotonous days to meet Hare occasionally as she rode or walked.

"My life here in my own general neighborhood has been a disappointment," Hare said. "I'll be glad to go to a democratic state like California. We're behind the times here."

Barbara lowered her eyelids. She thought she understood. Hare's intellectual achievements had not overcome the handicap of his humble social origin. In the North he would be taken on his own merits.

"I reckon you'll enjoy going to a new place," Barbara said. "To me it's an adventure to get as far as Charlottesville, while if I ever reached the other side of the Blue Ridge I'd be right overbearing the rest of my life."

Barbara was not at all pretty, but when she was interested in what she said or heard her eyes and face lighted up as if myriads of dancing torches were glowing behind them. Hare, as befitted a self-made man with still towering ambitions, was cautious in his emotional outgoings. But as he looked at Barbara he felt sorry that he was not likely to see her again, and he said:

"May I write to you occasionally?"

Barbara reflected. She knew that it would be quite easy for her to secure the mail before Anita saw it. There would be a spice of adventure in receiving letters from a state half a world away.

"I'll never have anything to tell you," she said, "because nothing ever happens here, and so my answers will be stupid. But I'd like to hear from you."

He held out his hand. "I must go back now. I have an appointment in town this evening."

"Good-by," she said.

She looked after him with an increasing sense of loss. She had never had a lover, nor longed for one. But in Hare she was losing the only young person whom she ever saw anything of, for all the neighbors, except Stephen Thornton, who did not count, were middle-aged or old

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

people. Now Hare was riding off to success and happiness because he was a man; and because she was a girl she could not ride after what she wanted, even if she knew what it was.

Twilight had come on her with short enough shrift, and, fearing a rebuke from Anita for being out in the dark, she took a short cut across the estate and came back to the house through the servants' quarters. The lamps were lighted in the living-room, but the blind had not been drawn, and she could see Gilbert and Anita sitting, one on each side of the table, silent, immovable. Their dull fixity was a symbol to her of her own fate; she stood in the darkness, looking at them, dreading the moment when she must take her place between them, as if by that action she were making her situation irrevocable.

II

THE OPEN DOOR

THE next day was Sunday. Usually Barbara prepared herself for church with a sense of excitement; at least she would see some fifty people gathered together to acknowledge and confess their manifold sins and wickedness, which they took with so little real belief that they seemed to lay the burden of them on the conventional spirit of the prayer-book. Barbara liked driving to service in the big surrey, Gilbert and Anita on the front seat, and she behind where she was free to watch without the espionage of Anita's curious eyes. She liked passing other vehicles full of the "second-class" people, going to their various dissenting churches, their cheerful faces modified slightly by a sense of Sunday decorum. Then came the little thrill when Gilbert darted down the last steep hill with something of the old spirit which had caused his college friends to name him "Galloping Gilbert," swooped around the sharp turn at the bottom, always to the accompaniment of a little shriek from Anita, which he pretended not to hear, and then went discreetly up the windy slope that was topped by the gray little square-towered church. Barbara understood that this bit of recklessness was all that was left of the old Gilbert.

For some reason, on this Sunday Gilbert took the hill discreetly, though from sheer habit Anita shrieked when he made the turn. Barbara's brooding mouth relaxed into a pitying smile. At least she would not change places with poor, sick, crabbed Anita, not even to own

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

Grassmere, and some day to own Grassmere was her dearest wish. Gilbert drove into the churchyard and fastened his horses under the shed. Then the three entered the church, Gilbert and Anita going to the Langworthy pew, and Barbara taking her seat at the little organ. There was something about the utter silence of the place that seemed stifling and artificial to Barbara. She preferred the atmosphere of a dissenting church she had once attended, where the babies rolled on shawls on the floor and where there was a constant variety of subdued rustling sounds.

From her seat before the organ Barbara surveyed the audience. First of all her eyes caught those of Mr. Huntley Rhodes, who bowed to her impressively. She smiled faintly at him. She liked him to bow, because in that still atmosphere it seemed a daring thing to do, and she was always amused at the expression on his face after the bow. Huntley looked rather like an intelligent sheep. He had hair that was partly blond and partly gray, as befitted his fifty years, and very closely thatched. His eyes were light blue, and his long upper lip curled over his under lip in a fashion of benevolent propriety. After he had bowed to Barbara he always quivered this upper lip and lifted his chin in firm self-righteousness. Barbara thought he was a nice little man; the most significant factor in her attitude toward him was that she never thought of him without that adjective "little."

Barbara's gaze wandered from Huntley Rhodes, and flickered across the rest of the congregation. Most of the faces were, like his, British, and of course middle-aged; they bore the monumental repose which is the inalienable mark of British self-respect, and which they carried even into the house of the Lord. He had created them, it is true; He had done them the favor of making them English subjects, but though the prayer-book said they were there in a humble spirit, still humility ill befitted any member of an empire with two hundred million people

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

behind him. The few Southern faces, under the middle-aged surfaces, had a subdued charm and vivacity which should have appealed to Barbara; but she lost the sense of it precisely because they were middle-aged. In the back of the church she saw Leonard Hare beside the Streeters. His people were dissenters, but it struck Barbara that with his rise in the world it was only natural that he should have become an Episcopalian. Stephen Thornton was not in church; he worked on Sunday, like any Yankee.

The clergyman entered from the vestry-room, and the service began. Barbara followed it mechanically. There were Sundays when her pent-up emotions flowed into the majestic words of the service, leaving her at peace. She would find a strange comfort in the thought of the many millions of people who, since the Church began, had transported their sorrows by that gentle vehicle of prayer. But on this morning she presented a hard plane to the noble, well-tried words in which all the congregation joined. In the middle of the Litany, at the words "Let us pray," she felt the old-time impatience that had oppressed her as a child, when she had rebelliously thought, "Oh, haven't we prayed enough?" The odor of the flowers on the altar seemed to her cloying, and the slight whine in the clergyman's voice caused her to grit her teeth with impatience.

When she played the last hymn, after each verse she added a refrain, on purpose to call up a reproachful expression in Huntley Rhodes's eyes. He disliked anything which marred the simplicity of the service, or which made the practice of the Church at all like that of the dissenters. Still, in a spirit of perverseness, as the congregation dispersed she played as a postlude a part of Liszt's second rhapsody, which she knew Rhodes would recognize despite the peculiar time to which she adapted it. She glanced at him; he looked like a sad sheep, and she thought it was a shame to tease him.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

He waited for her at the church door and escorted her to the surrey, where Anita and Gilbert were already seated. He helped her in, and as she held out her hand in farewell Anita said:

"Won't you let me carry you home to dinner, Huntley? Ride with us."

"I certainly will," he said, climbing into the seat beside Barbara with what she considered rather an absurd exhibition of jauntiness. She reflected that when she got to be old she'd stay old.

Gilbert shook the reins and the horses broke into a brisk homeward pace. Barbara was silent, thinking that since Anita had invited Huntley Rhodes home to dinner for three Sundays in succession that was perhaps a sign that dormant hospitable instincts were beginning to awaken. Perhaps her health was improving, and maybe some day Grassmere would be the same open house it had been in the days of Colonel Langworthy.

"You deserve to be reproached, young woman, for tacking on those cheap ends to the hymns," said Rhodes in the same high voice that seemed to Barbara to accord perfectly with his mild face.

"Oh, you've varied the scolding this time. Usually you call me a 'naughty little girl,'" Barbara said.

"Why do you do it?" Rhodes asked.

"To give us a topic of conversation," returned Barbara, flippantly. Then she repented her remark, for Rhodes flushed heavily. Barbara supposed that elderly people were sensitive, did not want to be reminded that they had so little in common with the young; perhaps she hadn't been quite kind to Huntley Rhodes. She began to talk to him in her soft, drawling voice about Leonard Hare and his Northern friends who were going to carry him off to fame and fortune.

They passed Stephen Thornton striding along, head down, intent upon some case. Without looking at them he dragged off his hat.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"There's another fellow bound for fame and fortune," Rhodes said. "I don't know that I altogether like this new spirit that our young men have. They don't see anything but the one object they're after; they miss a lot of fine things by the way. I don't approve of concentration if it's going to be so intense that it blinds a man in the eyes and the soul both."

It was the first remark he had ever made that interested her, and Barbara let her myriad of little torches glow out behind her smiling eyes. Involuntarily Rhodes put his hand on her arm, and Anita, glancing behind, gave a high, coy laugh, and cried:

"Look here, you two!"

Barbara shrank back into a corner of her seat, her face crimsoning. How silly Anita was! There was some common blood in her on her mother's side, and it was always showing. Barbara said no more until they reached Grassmere. Then, while Anita was hurrying up the servants, who, as usual, had not expected the family home so early, Barbara made perfunctory conversation with her brother and Rhodes. She did it with a better grace because she reflected that after dinner she could slip off alone with a book to the grove. Anita, who was always lively after dinner, would never miss her.

On the way from the dining-room she deserted, and hurried to the sunshiny bit of sward where she had hung her hammock between two stout oaks. She walked quickly, a gay bit of color in the scarlet spencer she had knitted for these autumn days of frost and sunshine. She had a sense of unwonted freedom. But her leisure did not last long; she had been gone but half an hour when she heard Gilbert's footsteps. She sat up in the hammock with a sense of impatient resignation; Anita was tired and she had sent for her to play hostess. Gilbert approached her with a deprecating expression, and she slipped to her feet, asking quickly:

"Is Anita cross because I came away?"

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"No," Gilbert said. "No, she hasn't asked for you. Hand me a cushion, Babbie."

She gave him one of her pillows, and he chose a place for it on the grass, picking the driest spot with old-maidish solicitude for his person.

"I thought I'd have a talk with you," Gilbert said, and then he coughed uneasily.

Somehow Barbara found her heart beating uncomfortably. "Brother, I wrote to Mrs. Everleigh to see if I couldn't be governess to her children," she said. "She replied yesterday that she was trying to get a college graduate. I reckon I'm not well enough educated to teach anything but poor white children."

Gilbert scowled. "There's no reason why my sister should work for her living. Grassmere isn't ours, but I do enough on the place to pay your way and mine."

His voice was bitter. Poor Gilbert wasn't free, either, Barbara reflected. She knelt down on the grass by his side and gave him one of her rare caresses. She was demonstrative by nature, but her constraint with Anita usually extended to her brother.

"If I were sure of my health," Gilbert said, hoarsely, after she had gone back to the hammock, "I could take care of you, no matter what happened. But I've got a bad heart. I can't tell when—"

Barbara uttered a cry.

"Wait!" he said, quietly. "I want you not to think of me, but of yourself. I don't know how long I'll last, and Anita has lost almost everything but this place. She made bad investments. When she sold Bayonne, it wasn't done from stinginess, but because she needed the money."

"Oh, poor Anita!" cried Barbara, remorsefully.

"Babbie," Gilbert said, hesitatingly, "Rhodes wants to marry you."

Barbara stared at him, her face a mask of astonishment. Gilbert, equally dreading her laughter or her indignation, hurried on.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"I want you to have a chance to think it over before he speaks to you. He's talking to Anita about it now."

"But—but he's an old man!" Barbara cried. "It's ridiculous!"

"He's perhaps thirty years older than you. But he's well-to-do, I believe. He could take good care of you, Babbie. He's a fine fellow, and, if I know him, he loves you."

"Oh, Gilbert, you can't want me to—to marry him!" Barbara said. "I know he's a nice little man, but, Gilbert!"

Gilbert turned uneasily on his cushion, his flabby face pale and unhappy.

"For God's sake, my dear," he said, solemnly, "what choice have I—or you? If I die what claim have you on Anita? As you say, you're not well enough educated to teach in any place where you'd be thrown with decent people or get decent treatment. If there were any young men left here, likely, or able to marry, that would be a different matter. If, half a dozen years ago, I'd been fit to earn my own living in any way a man should, you'd not have this choice put before you."

His tone was self-contemptuous. Barbara flamed to his defense.

"You've paid your shot, every step of the way," she said, hotly.

She lay back in the hammock, her face turned from her brother. Marriage had been far away on the border of her dreams. Her thoughts of the future had never gone beyond the long red road that led across the mountains, and the vague happenings that might come to one who was free to travel it and the other roads of the world. She was shocked at the presentation of a concrete person as her possible husband; the thought of a young man would have shocked her as much as the thought of a middle-aged man; that Rhodes was the latter took away somehow from the reality of the experience.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"Does Anita want me to?" she murmured, at last.

"I don't think it has occurred to Anita that you could refuse," Gilbert said. "But it has occurred to me. That's why I wanted to give you a bit of time to think it over. If you can't bear the idea of it, we'll dismiss Rhodes. Perhaps I can get together money enough to send you off somewhere for a visit where you'd meet people—"

A painful red grew in Barbara's face. "I don't want to go in for any speculation like that," she said. "I'd rather teach poor white trash. If I were as pretty as some girls, so pretty that proposals fell in my lap like autumn leaves, I might think of it."

"Proposals are much more frequent than marriages," said Gilbert, who had done his share of philandering. "It isn't always the man of your own age that makes the most congenial husband. You do get on with Rhodes, don't you?"

"Oh, get on!" said Barbara, drearily. "I don't know that one has to be congenial to be married."

"That's true enough," agreed Gilbert. Again he moved uneasily on his cushion, and asked: "Quite sure you understand what marriage is? Anita has talked to you?"

"Yes, I know the duties of marriage," Barbara said, primly.

Gilbert upheaved his great bulk. "Just think it over," he said. "I reckon Rhodes would be an easier master than Anita, and unless a girl has money in her own right somebody's bound to be her master. I don't know just what girls want out of life. Rhodes would do his house over for you, and take you wherever you wanted to go, and fill the place with guests, if you asked him to. You'd never again have to sit between Anita and me, watching the clock for bedtime to come." He bent over her and kissed her cheek, adding, "You think it over, Babbie."

When the sound of his heavy footsteps had died away

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

Barbara lay back drearily in the hammock. She felt as if her life were all fixed, and as good as over. Instead of looking at the dull, middle-aged faces of Gilbert and Anita for ever, she must look for ever at the affectionate, mild face of Huntley Rhodes. She would be less harried and driven than she was with Anita, day by day. Yes, day by day, but there were the nights—Barbara's imagination broke off, not in horror, but simply blankly. She could not realize any one as a husband. She could never be free now. Huntley Rhodes would travel with her all the roads of the world, if she asked him, perhaps, but she would not be free, because to be free meant to be alone.

Yet, what else could she do? She felt that she had neither charm nor beauty. No young man would wish to marry her, and there seemed to be no way that she could make her own living without humiliating her family. Anita would not let her teach second-class children. Anita would think she was lucky because such a kind, good little man—such a kind, good man as Huntley Rhodes was ready to marry her. Barbara knew, the moment she cut out the adjective "little," that she meant to consent to marry Rhodes.

"Mrs. Rhodes," she murmured, absently.

She was as unable to realize the state of marriage as she was to visualize some strange country which she had never seen. She could fancy herself in Huntley Rhodes's house, indeed, carrying his keys, managing his servants. She had a picture of herself in his garden, tearing out the miserable petunias and marigolds to make more room for roses. At this little suggestion of reconstruction she felt a sense of slight companionship for Rhodes, and if there was more than a touch of superiority in it she was unconscious of the fact.

"Of course we'd get on—and better than Gilbert and Anita do," Barbara said.

She really thought she was contemplating marriage with Rhodes, all unaware that a cold, virginal wall banked her

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

imagination, not realizing that she had simply decided that her acquaintance Rhodes would be as endurable in his house as her sister Anita in hers.

"I reckon I ought to go inside," she said.

With cheeks glowing and heart beating rapidly, and yet with reluctant feet, she began to walk slowly toward the house. As she approached she saw Rhodes and Anita standing on the front porch; they had come to look for her. Then Anita went inside; she was sending Rhodes to Barbara. The girl's heart suddenly felt like a lump of lead. As Rhodes approached her she saw, with smarting keenness, all the ridiculous traits that had always amused her—his pale, mild face, that convex, superior upper lip, the jaunty walk like that of a little school miss. There was an eager look in his light-blue eyes that startled her; perhaps Rhodes wanted her as much as she wanted to be free—and if he did—

Her cold heart began suddenly to beat as if it would suffocate her. Rhodes seemed to bear down upon her like some little swamping tug, bound to swirl her in his wake. His mouth was parted now, and she could see his lips trembling. He was coming close—too close. She put up her hands as if to ward him off. But she remembered that she meant to marry him; she had a moment in which to reconsider her decision. Then she changed her gesture of withdrawal to one of surrender. She gave herself to him, but she asked for more time.

"I—I've a dreadful headache," she said, breathlessly, "and I must go to my room. Will—will you come to-morrow?"

His kind, mild face was full at once of disappointment and solicitude. "You mean—come to see you?" he asked, significantly.

"Yes—yes," she stammered.

"I can wait longer if you like," he said, gently.

"No—come to-morrow," she said. "I—I'll be ready to see you to-morrow."

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

She gave him her hand; he took it and held it, cold within his own, while he escorted her to the porch. Then he kissed it, first gently, and afterward with a warmth that embarrassed her. Almost he extended his arms, but she kept her eyes down. Unconsciously she was murmuring over and over, "To-morrow."

She fled up-stairs, out of range of the surprised eyes of Anita, who had come into the hall to see what her return meant. She burst into her hideous yellow room and locked the door. Then she sat by the window, not feeling quite safe till he had driven away. When he had gone she threw herself on the bed, staring quietly at the ugly yellow roses on the wall. She heard Anita's quick, nervous footfall at her door; then her brother's heavy tread.

"Let the child alone, I tell you," Gilbert said in a tone of command he rarely used to Anita.

"But I want to know—"

"Didn't he tell you he was coming back to-morrow?"

"What harm would it do to ask her?" began Anita, querulously.

"I say I won't have her bothered."

"Oh, my head! You needn't be such a brute," she heard Anita moan.

She lay quietly while the afternoon turned into twilight. She could hear the negroes singing in their cabin, and a little later Mammy Kate clattering in the kitchen, making waffles for the Sunday supper. Still later she heard Gilbert's heavy tread and knew that he was putting a tray of food outside her door. When he had gone she took it in; the excitement of the afternoon had not destroyed her appetite. She visualized Anita and Gilbert sitting opposite each other in silence, with nothing to hold them there but habit. Her place between them was empty; it would soon be empty for all time. Vague, formless thoughts went through her mind, mostly about her father and mother; she was not dwelling at all on her future with Rhodes.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

At half past nine she heard Anita come up to bed. Then she stole down-stairs to Gilbert, who was locking the doors and windows. Though it impeded him, he put one arm about her and led her with him. When he reached the front door he locked it more slowly than usual, and then, as was his habit, he said, half seriously and half humorously:

"Well, thank God, another day over without much bad luck—at least, without any we can't stand."

III

ENGAGED

BARBARA was always a little late to breakfast, not because she did not know how to be on time, but because Anita's nerves were steadier after she had had a first cup of coffee. The next morning she did not appear till Mammy Kate's last batch of cakes was being carried in. She had scarcely taken her place at the table when there came the clatter of hoofs on the gravel drive. She dropped her eyes, confused. Anita, looking out, said in a pleased, shrill tone:

"Well, I declare! Here's Huntley Rhodes before breakfast is over. He certainly is devoted."

She looked at Barbara with a sympathetic smile. The girl summoned a pinched smile in reply. It was strange, she thought; there had been no change in her since yesterday, yet she had become of some consequence in Anita's eyes. Perhaps other people would feel the same way. Sometimes now they said, "Poor little Barbara Langworthy." They would not say, "Poor Mrs. Huntley Rhodes."

The hoof-beats had ceased. Barbara knew exactly how Rhodes was dismounting—a little stiffly, his upper lip compressed with the effort.

Anita rose from the table, saying, "Come into the drawing-room when you're ready, honey."

When Barbara appeared in the drawing-room she wore her quaint blue garden hat and carried the clipping-shears. She looked absurdly young and helpless as she

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

came timorously through the door. Rhodes's kind face took on an expression of devotion and protectiveness. Anita wished that Rhodes were a little nearer the child's age. Barbara gave her hand to Rhodes gravely, and said to Anita:

"Sister, you told me yesterday that you wanted me to cut the rest of the roses."

"I reckon it's the last crop," Anita said. "Don't you want to rest a little before you start?"

"Cutting roses isn't work," Barbara replied.

"You ought never to have anything harder than that to do," Rhodes said, and his tone bespoke a determination that she should not.

Barbara, her head lowered a little, went into the hall. Anita followed her as far as the front door.

"Take good care of her," she said to Rhodes, a touch of regret in her voice.

Rhodes reddened, for he was very sensitive. He walked silently beside Barbara, down the drive and into the garden. It was Barbara who spoke first, directing his attention to a gleaming silver cobweb screening a deep-green bush.

"I used to think they were the fairy queen's cloaks spread out to air," she said. "I spent a lot of time in this garden when I was a little chap."

"You ought always to walk in a garden," he said, tenderly.

"I know every inch of the garden, but I've never walked the full length of a city street," she said.

She began to clip the roses with steady, skilful hands. He took the flowers from her, one by one, watching her movements rather wistfully. Presently he put out his hand for the shears and drew her to the decrepit summer-house. He laid the roses and shears on a seat, and then he said, gently:

"You know that I want to marry you, Barbara?"

"Yes, Mr. Huntley," she said, looking at him with grave, docile eyes.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

He thought she spoke rather in the voice of a child that has learned its lesson perfectly.

"I hope the thought is not painful to you, Barbara?"

Barbara sat down on the bench, and looked up at him with troubled eyes. "I have been thinking of it all night," she said, slowly. "Mr. Rhodes, I don't love you. I don't love anybody that way. I never have had a sweetheart. I've just sat by the road and watched life go by and I haven't taken any part in it. I don't feel as if it was ever meant that I should."

"That's because you are so young," he said; "but I could help you, Barbara."

She lowered her eyes. "I am in some ways; in other ways I'm old. I am as good a housekeeper and nurse as if I were fifty." She colored, remembering that fifty was about his age. Then she went on quickly: "I want to be honest with you, Mr. Rhodes. I reckon I'm not very fond of anybody but brother, and even brother isn't very real to me. I keep thinking of him as he used to be when father and mother were alive; it's the younger Gilbert I remember, who wasn't fat and quiet, but who sang before he came into the room. Nobody that I know to-day seems very real, or, at least, very much part of my life—not even you."

"But, after all, I've seen more of you than anybody else outside of Gilbert and Anita," he pointed out.

"Yes, I know you have; we've spent hours and hours together in the last four years while you've been teaching me music," Barbara said with a troubled voice, "and that is just what distresses me. Since I've seen so much of you why haven't I loved you?"

"Ah, my dear, you thought I was too old," said Rhodes in a rueful voice.

Barbara blushed. "To think of as a sweetheart, yes," she replied. "But why haven't I thought of you or of any one as a real friend?"

"It's because you've been asleep, Barbara," he said,

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

slowly. "You haven't even been dreaming. I don't think you're the dreaming kind, for I never see you reading novels. You've been sound asleep."

The little torches of her mind lit up her face. "But that's just what I said to myself last night," she said; "and I think that perhaps if I were married to you and began a life of my own I'd grow fond of you. I don't say that I could ever give you a sweetheart's love, or a wife's love, because I don't know what they are. But I do know that I used to make brother happy until the last year or two, and perhaps I could make you happy. I reckon living together is just a habit, and if you keep interested in music and the house and the servants and people and going places that it can be a pleasant habit; and if you sit back in your chairs and don't try to think of anything to say to each other and watch the clock for bedtime then it becomes a dreary habit."

"You're a little philosopher," Rhodes said; "but I think you're right, Barbara—maybe because I want to think it so much. I've loved you for over a year now. It was a shock to me to find that I did. It wasn't in my scheme of things to love a young girl. I've been looking for you all my life, dear. It isn't because I'm middle-aged and want young life about me to turn back time. It's you I want, and if I'd found you when I was twenty I couldn't have loved you any more deeply and honestly than I do now. I've always wanted Barbara Langworthy."

Barbara was touched. She had accepted the fact that Rhodes wanted to marry her, but she had not realized that he loved her. And if he had always wanted her—that meant that he, too, had had to sit on one side and watch life go by.

"I've got a young spirit," Rhodes said. "I don't feel my age."

He did not know that he was making the perennial remark of the middle-aged, but Barbara, for all her inex-

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

perience, guessed that he was. She felt sorry for him and more friendly than she ever had toward any one except her brother.

"I'm really not used to young people," she said; "I've only just wanted them."

"You shall have them," he declared. "We'll go away where we'll meet them, and then we'll take them back with us. I sha'n't be a drag on you, Barbara—till I must." The eager look in his eyes faded. "Till I must," he went on, slowly. "Our family is short-lived, but that's no sign that I shall be. When you are fifty, as full of life as I am now, I shall be eighty—an old man having to go to bed right after supper, and waking long before dawn to doze in an arm-chair through another day. Oh, I've thought of it, Barbara, and then I wonder if I've the right— And yet, it isn't you that would have to be my nurse. I could arrange, surely, so that your life need not be hampered."

Barbara looked at him with misty eyes. "I reckon we'll be safe with each other," she said, "if only we put each other first."

Rhodes reflected that it was a fine ideal, and that probably most couples started with it. He had a whimsical vision of the ideal as a concrete, winged creature, drawing a wedding-car wherein sat two souls, sweet and tender and light as air, striving to give each other the softest corners. And then some day the poor ideal felt that the weight of the car was more than he could bear. He looked behind, and the white souls had turned into two critical human egoists trying to appropriate the best corners for themselves and passing judgment on the selfishness of each other. "We sha'n't fail, as some people do," he said.

He held out his arms to her, and Barbara came into them, slowly. He kissed her cheek tenderly, then he held her fiercely to him and kissed her mouth, her eyes, her hair. Barbara hadn't known that kisses could be like

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

that. She felt frightened, repelled. She found herself pushing Rhodes away with all her strength. He was so absorbed in his own emotions that for a few moments he was unaware of her resistance. Then he released her, paling.

"I beg your pardon, my darling. I frightened you."

"Are all men like that?" Barbara panted.

"When they love women," Rhodes said. "But I will be gentle with you, dear."

Barbara's sense of justice was strong, and she was not a selfish girl. "I didn't understand," she said; "and of course I want to kiss you, Mr. Rhodes, but—but, not quite so much."

Rhodes tried to cover his disappointment with a bantering tone.

"Come, let's bargain," he said. "How many kisses am I to have?"

"Two when you come and two when you go away?" said Barbara, doubtfully. "Is—is that less than usual?"

"Barbara, don't try to think what is or is not usual," Rhodes said, his voice a little stern. "Give me what you can freely and no more."

"Suppose we say a few in between, and kisses on the cheek not to count, and leave the rest to chance," Barbara said with a brave attempt at lightness.

"You are a good child. Shall we cut the rest of the roses?"

He gathered up the roses and the shears. At the doorway Barbara hesitated, then she put her arms about his neck and kissed him exactly as she kissed her brother.

"I'm going to be ever and ever so good," she whispered.

He leaned his cheek against her brown hair. He was happy in a wistful way. Barbara was his, and a man of fifty must compromise; he had a fighting chance that she might become his in the way he wanted her.

"Come along," he said, taking her hand and swinging her out into the path.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

Barbara went back to the roses with a sense of relief. As she clipped at the thorny stems she was readjusting her sense of marriage. There would be times when she would have to grit her teeth and bear a physical nearness that was repugnant to her. But then she often had to grit her mental teeth at the nearness of Anita's stinginess and bad temper. One must just try to think of other things and be sweet.

She must begin practising conversation with him at once. It would be part of her career as a wife. Barbara was really considerably interested in this new career; it was her first chance of something important to do.

"Did you bring any news this morning?" she said.

"How could I think of news, with you at the end of my journey?" Rhodes asked. "But I did bring you this, dear; it was my mother's."

He drew from his pocket a purple plush case and, opening it, disclosed a magnificent diamond in an antique Etruscan setting.

"Oh!" breathed Barbara, "it is the Rhodes diamond! Oh, but I can't take it! It's too splendid for little me!"

"Years and years ago, before there was a you in the world, mother gave it to me for you," Rhodes said.

He put it on her finger, and Barbara looked at it with sparkling eyes.

"I can't help loving pretty things," she said.

A slight shadow crossed Rhodes's face. "I wish I had more money than I have," he said. "But never mind; I'll be rich some day. Meantime I've a jewel-case full of things that any princess might be proud to wear, but that aren't good enough for Barbara."

Barbara gave him a shy glance. It was not disagreeable to be made so much of in this way. It was comforting to know that there was some one in the world who really put her first. Gilbert wanted to, but his bond obliged him to put Anita first.

"There!" she said. "Now we have so many roses that

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

the sweet scent will give Anita a headache. Come back to the house and help me arrange them."

They passed up the driveway to the house. Mammy Kate was in the hall, and she caught Barbara to her great bosom and crooned over her.

"Mammy's baby goin' away to a house of her own! What mammy gwine do widout her chile?"

"You come along with her," Rhodes said.

Barbara, a little tearful, passed into the drawing-room, where Anita was sitting, her nervous hands folded. Gilbert was there, too, evidently at Anita's command, rather uneasy, and embarrassed at their obvious waiting for an announcement.

"It's all right," Rhodes said, gaily, waving the shears with a jauntiness that seemed to Barbara slightly absurd.

Barbara's impulse was to go first to Gilbert. But since her future was to be devoted to forgetting her own wants, she went to Anita and held up her smooth cheek. Anita pecked at it.

"Well," she said in a relieved way, "I'm sure you'll be happy, Barbara."

Gilbert kissed his sister silently, and then, murmuring something about the horses, he left them.

"I expect I'm in the way," Anita remarked in a sprightly tone.

"No, you're not. I'm just going," Rhodes said.

"Won't you stay to dinner?" Anita asked in a surprised tone.

"I'll come back to-morrow," Rhodes said. "I must give Barbara a little leisure in which to get used to being engaged."

He was a dear, Barbara reflected, so considerate and gentle. She kissed her hand to him brightly, and he added:

"Besides, I want to go about and tell every one what a lucky man I am."

Barbara kissed him good-by and went with him to the

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

porch, where she watched him mount. Then she came back slowly to Anita

"Now tell me all your plans," Anita said, quite, Barbara saw, as if she were addressing another grown woman and her equal.

"Plans?" said Barbara, vaguely.

"Yes—when you're to be married, where you're going for your trip."

"Oh—we didn't get that far," Barbara said, hurriedly.

"I—I suppose you and he will arrange that."

Anita colored. "Really, Barbara," she said, sharply, "Gilbert and I are not handing you over to Huntley as if you were a chattel. You don't have to marry him unless you want to."

"I want to," Barbara said. Then, in order to ward off any intimacies of conversation, she held up her engagement ring. "See what he gave me."

After Anita's ecstasies were exhausted Barbara set about her belated household tasks, feeling a pleasant sense of ease, not knowing that it was not because she was engaged, but because Rhodes had gone home, that her spirits were so lightened.

The next morning had all the warmth of spring. Rhodes was not coming till the afternoon, and when her household tasks were over Barbara took her hammock and went deep into the grove to try and think steadily about her future. She was afraid that she did not really understand fully all it would mean to stop living with Gilbert and Anita and begin living with Rhodes. She had not rested well the night before, and after she had hung her hammock and was swaying back and forth her thoughts began to wander, to become nebulous and remote; a gentle humming chimed in her senses with the movement of the hammock, the light grew dim, and presently she was asleep.

Stephen Thornton came through the grove, taking a short cut to call on his cousin Anita. He was allowing

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

himself three days' vacation, dating from that morning, and there was no need of his taking the short cut so far as time was concerned, but he was so used to husbanding every moment that the habit clung even in his hour of leisure. Thornton had almost an insanity of concentration. When he worked he worked furiously, seeing only the immediate object of his pursuit. Friends he left on the side-lines, so to speak. They must wait for him there or they might go on with their own concerns, but they must expect nothing of him till he had attained what he had been working for. His cousin, Mrs. Langrel, was the only exception to this rule of neglect. Except for the uncle with whom he lived, Anita was his only other near relative, yet for months he had not been to see her, had practically forgotten her existence. When he had to rest, his mind was a blank; his exhaustion was so complete that he had no more real life than an automaton.

This second day of Barbara's engagement marked for him the attainment of his greatest ambition. He had been asked to go into partnership with a brilliant rising lawyer in Richmond who did a great deal of corporation work. From the beginning of his law course he had had just that ambition in mind; he had fought toward it in the face of all sorts of threatened defeat, all sorts of mounting obstacles. His fight had reminded him of the progress of a runner toiling heavily against wind and rain, with set hands clenched. Now he had won. With his elder partner's prestige, with his own gifts, his good voice, his forceful oratory, he felt that he would go far, that there need, indeed, be no limit to his success.

He was relaxed now, alive, after months, to the people who for so long had been no more to him than trees, walking. He had called on the Streeters, mindful that he had met Lucia the year before in Richmond and had assured her that when she spent the autumn in his countryside she would find it hard to escape his society. But Lucia and her father had gone home the day before. He

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

had stopped in front of Leonard Hare's office, only to find the door locked, the sign taken down, and the window blank; some one told him that Hare had gone with the Streeters. He had passed Rhodes going to the railroad station to get a basket of fruit he had ordered for Barbara, and, commenting to some one on the older man's rejuvenation, he had been told that Rhodes was going to marry Barbara Langworthy.

Now, on his way to see Anita, he came on Barbara asleep. Her soft hat had fallen back from her brown hair. Her eyelids were beautifully modeled, and the long, heavy lashes helped to conceal the fact that her cheek-bones were too high. Her red lips were parted, and their lax lines made her face seem pathetic and helpless. One little hand was under her head, the other curled up against her throat. She was a winning picture, and Thornton gazed long at her. He knew she was not pretty, yet at the moment she seemed beautiful. There was an esthetic strain in Thornton; as he looked at Barbara, so slim and relaxed, so red and pale, so little under the gorgeous autumn foliage, she became to him not at all Barbara Langworthy, but simply the sweet, alluring vision of all girlhood. Impulsively he bent and kissed her.

Barbara opened her eyes as he lifted his head; he saw her look change from blankness to scorn. She had been dreaming, had been on the point of waking; she had thought that Rhodes had kissed her.

"I supposed you were a gentleman," she said, quietly.

Thornton flushed, with anger rather than with embarrassment. "Intentions have to be counted. I wasn't thinking of you at all when I kissed you. I'm sorry, of course."

"Sister Anita is up at the house," she said with an air of dismissal.

"You might tell me that you forgive me," Thornton said, smiling at her quizzically, looking very big and brown, just as he had years ago when he had come

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

into the Grassmere nursery to tease her and laugh at her.

"If you weren't thinking of me I don't see that you need my forgiveness," she said.

"Honestly, Barbara, I'd forgotten that you'd grown up," he said. Then his face darkened and he added: "Grown up, and, by Jove! they tell me you're to be married. But that's only gossip, isn't it? You're not going to marry Huntley Rhodes, are you?"

Thornton could be indirect enough when he wanted to, but he was also capable of a surprising bluntness. He could not think of Barbara as anything but a child. Knowing nothing of the conditions of the Langworthy household, he supposed that she was perhaps playing with good old Rhodes and that somebody ought to tell her to stop it. He was fond of good old Rhodes. If she were in earnest—then equally some one ought to tell her to stop it. Barbara had not been in Thornton's mind for months, any more than Anita, but as he looked at her now he remembered that he had gone to school with her brothers and that she had no one to take care of her but old Gilbert, who wasn't much good.

"It isn't true, is it, Barbara?" he insisted.

Barbara looked at him with dilating eyes. She gave way occasionally to moods of irritability, and even of temper, but they had always been sudden. Never before had she felt such a slow rage as consumed her while she faced Thornton. She got out of the hammock and clutched its rope with a tense hand.

"Will you tell me," she said, slowly, "what right you have to come charging full tilt at me this way?"

"Oh, I say, Barbara, don't put me too thoroughly in the wrong. Am I not an old friend?"

"An—old—friend," she said, slowly. "Old friend, how often have you come to Grassmere in the last two years?"

"Oh, see here, Barbara," he said, embarrassed, "every

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

one knows I've been busy, but that doesn't change my feelings."

"You come on me by chance," she said, "for I know you weren't seeking me out. You have found out casually that I am engaged, and you express your views with a frankness that wouldn't sit well on my closest kin."

"I beg your pardon, Miss Barbara," he said, crisply, a slow, angry flush covering his face.

"Listen to me before you go," she said, checking him. "I've been here under your very feet for two years, lonely, growing from a child to a woman. You've known well enough that there were no other young men around here but yourself and Leonard Hare, whom sister Anita won't receive. And what have you done for me in two years? Just nothing. I'd have been glad of five minutes' talk a week, but you never tried to help me. I've been sick from loneliness under your eyes, and you've seen nothing but your law-books. I wouldn't treat a strange dog that way. The only person who has cared has been Huntley Rhodes, and then you come here and put on a schoolmaster voice and tell me I oughtn't to marry him."

Thornton's flush had paled; his face looked almost gray. "Barbara," he said, quietly, "I beg your pardon from my soul. I've been a cad, and—I honor Rhodes. No one has ever talked to me as you have just now, and I trust I shall never deserve it again. But I have deserved it. I've been equally blind and selfish. Maybe you'll forgive me sometime."

He lifted his hat and pushed his way quickly through the grove in the direction of the house. Barbara sank back in the hammock, still very much stirred, still angry through and through at Thornton, and with a new loyalty to Rhodes stirring in her heart. Barbara was in many ways a practical person; she realized that her tirade against Thornton, just like her unrest under Anita's hospitality, had taken her one step closer to Rhodes. She welcomed every smallest detail that promised a unity with him.

IV

A WAY OUT

ANITA had said to Barbara that Rhodes wanted to be married as soon as possible, and that she thought a month or six weeks would be long enough for the engagement to last. At first Barbara had been appalled; she had had a vague idea of an engagement that should extend perhaps till June, and then a wedding which would lead to Europe. Anita did not argue the point at much length; she merely said that she saw no particular reason for waiting, and that time meant more to Rhodes than it did to Barbara. The girl saw the reasonableness of that, and, after all, she told herself, since she was to be married for so long, perhaps, on her count, it did not really matter when she began; and on good, kind Mr. Rhodes's count it did matter greatly. She chose six weeks, which would bring her wedding-day into the middle of November.

Those six weeks were more packed with excitement than any Barbara had ever known. All the neighbors called to see her, and she perceived that to them she was indeed no longer little Barbara Langworthy, but a girl who had suddenly become marriageable and who was soon to be the mistress of a house like themselves. Already they felt the subtle *camaraderie* which married women offer the engaged girl. She is not yet taken fully into their company, but she stands on the threshold. Because some man has wooed her she is given the recognition for ever denied to the unengaged girl.

Barbara, serving afternoon tea to these guests, wondered

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

if they commented much on the difference in age between herself and her fiancé. She decided that they troubled themselves little enough about it; the state of marriage only concerned them, and in their dull daily round they saw nothing beyond. In this estimate she wronged them. All the women who came and listened to Anita's chatter about clothes, and looked at Barbara, wished that the girl could have been matched with some one nearer her age. Yet not one of them but had made her own relinquishments, had dispersed impossible dreams, and they knew that Rhodes was as unselfish as he was devoted.

One day the mail brought Barbara a note in Sophia Langrel's angular, distinguished handwriting: would she come that afternoon to Rosegarland and have a cup of tea with an old woman who no longer paid calls? Barbara had not gone to Rosegarland for two years—not since she had stopped taking French lessons from Mrs. Langrel.

"It's mighty strange that she didn't ask me," Anita commented, querulously. "I've always said that the English, in spite of their passion for good form, can show the worst manners of any people on the globe. She summons you like she was royalty." Anita knew that she had never been a favorite with Mrs. Langrel. Barbara's direct gaze warned her that she was not concealing her resentment. "Of course you'll have to go," she said, hastily. "I reckon she wants to congratulate you."

Barbara set off for Rosegarland with a contented sense of importance. The last time she had gone she had been only a little girl, to be snubbed because she pronounced the "eu" sound badly. Now, engaged to a nice Englishman, she was going to receive the good wishes of the woman who, before grief had broken her, had been the natural leader of the county society.

As she walked up the hedge-inclosed paths of Rosegarland Barbara mused upon the enduring love the English have always shown for Virginia. She was the state to which they had come in the days of the Cavaliers,

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

loving the graces of life, but, nevertheless, full of the British instinct for colonizing—an instinct so deep that it took no account of the harsh difficulties in the way of the pioneers. While their Puritan brethren and enemies were going to New England for the sake of freedom, the Cavaliers continued to go to Virginia for love's sake. Even when England lost the colonies the old habit could not be broken. The modern Englishmen came much in the spirit of their ancestors—to find a new home suited to their shrunken fortunes, to make the most of the new conditions, and to reproduce as nearly as possible the English atmosphere.

The house of the Honorable Sophia Langrel was as close an imitation as she had been able to achieve of the Georgian home of her father. The oak-paneled room into which Barbara was shown had the proportions and some of the furniture of the drawing-room of the old woman's girlhood. A few family portraits hung on the walls, and an old-fashioned work-box that had been her grandmother's lay on the top of the closed spinnet. Barbara knew that there had been no music in that house for many years. From force of habit Barbara took the small chair in which she had been accustomed to sit when she recited her French lesson, glancing involuntarily at the tall screen as if she expected to hear Mrs. Langrel's voice coming from behind it. Then she changed her seat to an opulent chintz-covered arm-chair. She looked about the familiar room, feeling a kind of immovability about it. Her life, she reflected, was as fixed as that; perhaps every one's life was, did one but know.

"Ah, Barbara!"

Her hostess had come in silently from an adjoining room. Her tragic glance did not relax at the sight of the girl; it was as if no joy, no pathos, no emotion whatever, could again carve its trace on the stone of her face. Her eyes were inscrutable, her voice even, and yet Barbara received a quick impression that Mrs. Langrel had sent for

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

her not merely to wish her happiness; there was something behind, and the girl's senses leaped upon watch.

"It was good of you to send for me," Barbara said.

Mrs. Langrel touched her cheek softly. "Such a little child," she said, "and going to be married!"

A negro brought the tea, and little Mary Thornton followed at his heels to beg for cake. Mrs. Langrel asked Barbara about her plans, not looking at her very much, always giving the girl the sense of repressing the questions she really wanted to ask. Barbara talked freely enough, though she had a sudden tremor of shyness as it came over her afresh that it was strange that she should be going to Huntley Rhodes's house to live. Mrs. Langrel began to talk of the days when she had first come to Virginia; since her son had left home she had never been heard to allude to the later days of her marriage. Then she talked of Barbara's father and mother; presently Barbara was weeping, while little Mary Thornton stared at her intently over the last crumb of cake. Mrs. Langrel lifted the girl's face and looked into it with still tragic eyes; for all her emotion, Barbara's brain sprang to attention; she knew that what was coming was significant.

"Such a little, little child to be married," Mrs. Langrel sighed. Then she added, slowly: "Barbara, I have found myself wishing lately that you were my daughter; failing that, I have wished that you were living with me. I think that if this marriage had not been planned, and that if I could have persuaded your brother to spare you, I should have asked you to come to me."

Barbara gave a quick little sigh; she understood that she was really being offered a way of release from her engagement. For a dizzying moment she had a wild thrill of relief at the dream of freedom, the dream of escaping from the three closest to her. Then all her senses of loyalty and obligation and gratitude swung into battle line. She could never shame Gilbert and Anita by running away from their home; she could never hurt

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

good Mr. Rhodes by letting their world see that she did not want to marry him.

"You are very good to have thought of wanting me, Mrs. Langrel," she said, with steady eyes. "I hope you will let me come to see you often after I am married. Mr. Rhodes and I are going to make each other very happy, but I don't want to give up any one else who has cared for me."

"You are a brave child," Mrs. Langrel murmured. "After all, any one who has goodness and courage does not need anything else with which to meet life."

Barbara went away ill at ease. Here were two people who felt that there was something pathetic about her marriage—Stephen Thornton and Mrs. Langrel. She was shaken that any one should be sorry for her, afraid that she might become too sorry for herself. Her mind played about Mrs. Langrel's offer; considering it gave her a strange sense of superiority, of competence—as if, after all, she had the right of choice. Then she was seized with a fierce spasm of remorse, and as she walked homeward she gazed fixedly at her engagement ring, and conned over the long tally of Rhodes's kindnesses to her. Thus she was able to greet him contentedly when he met her at the gate of Grassmere, his eyes showing very clearly what the sight of her meant to him. It seemed strange to Barbara that she should count so much to any one except Gilbert.

Besides callers, Barbara had received two letters from Leonard Hare and a picture of Bayonne from Lucia Streeter. Hare's first letter was an enthusiastic description of Pasadena and a glowing account of his professional prospects, which, thanks to the wide influence of the Streeters, were already developing into something tangible. His second letter was a stiff little note, wishing her joy in her approaching marriage. Evidently, Barbara thought, he shared Thornton's belief that she ought not to be marrying Rhodes. Barbara was vaguely disappointed;

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

she could have wished that Hare had written as enthusiastically about her future as he had about his own.

She had the further excitement of shopping. Anita was never too tired to go to Charlottesville; she even talked of a visit to Richmond. Anita acted almost as if she were engaged rather than Barbara; over the girl's trousseau she had all the flutter and pleasurable glow of a prospective bride. She was generous in her outlay, purchasing much more than Barbara wished to accept. Anita wanted to fill all Barbara's hours so that there should be no time for fears or regrets. Rhodes came every day, generally with some gift, always with some plan for Barbara's pleasure. With all the new motion in her life the girl found plenty of topics of conversation with her lover.

There were moments of terrified withdrawals, of a wish to live her life alone, even if she had to teach poor white children and win Anita's eternal displeasure. One of these came after she and Anita had returned from Charlottesville late one afternoon and were laying away their purchases in a press which had belonged to Barbara's mother. Anita always kept it locked. On this occasion she gave the key to Barbara, saying:

"I always meant that you should have all your mother's things. In that bottom drawer are your little baby clothes. I hope your own baby will wear them some day, Barbara. A woman isn't much use in the world unless she's had a child."

Anita was thinking of herself rather than of Barbara, and she did not see the girl's blanching face. As soon as she could Barbara fled to her own room and locked the door. A child! That was horrible! Shudderingly all that she had ever known or guessed of the intimacies of marriage swept blackly and nauseatingly into her mind. She lay huddled on her bed with clenched hands and bitten lips. No, she couldn't! she couldn't! She must ask Gilbert to free her! She couldn't go on!

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

But when the late afternoon light faded and the darkness fell and she heard the familiar household sounds that warned her that supper was under way and that Gilbert had come in from the stables then she knew that it would be almost impossible to retreat. She had never yet been able to resist Anita's hard, nagging force. How could she expect to master it in a crisis in which Anita would take the position that the honor of the family was involved?

When Mammy Kate's daughter, young Sissy, came to see why she had not gone down to supper she sent back word that she had a headache and could not eat anything. Then in the dark she waited tensely for Anita. After a long time she heard Anita coming down the hallway, her clicking steps a little more hurried than usual. Barbara pressed herself back against the pillows, her muscles steeled. Anita entered, carrying a candle.

"All in the dark?" Anita said, trying to make her tone commonplace. "Is your headache very bad?"

"Yes. It's not my head only; it's everything. Sister Anita, I can't marry Mr. Rhodes. I can't do it!"

Anita, her hand trembling, set down the candle on the table by the side of the bed.

"Oh, you don't really mean that, honey!" she said in a careless voice underlaid by a note of irritated anxiety. "You'll feel mighty different in the morning."

"I won't, sister Anita. I haven't wanted to marry him all along. I don't want to marry any one. I have a horror of it—of marriage!"

Barbara's voice had a wild note, but Anita answered still with a careless intonation.

"Law, honey, what ails you is just a kind of stage-fright. All young girls feel it, and it doesn't mean a thing. Six months from now you'll laugh at yourself for having been so silly."

Barbara sat up in bed, her eyes wide and appealing. "Please, sister Anita, please have mercy on me! You

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

said yourself when we first talked about it that I didn't have to marry him if I didn't want to, that you weren't going to hand me over to him like a chattel."

"Barbara," cried Anita, sharply, "how dare you talk in this melodramatic way about my having mercy on you! You're hysterical! You should have talked to me like this when the marriage was first suggested if your feelings are so strong. You said yourself that you wanted to marry him."

"I said that because I knew you wanted me to do it. But I didn't know it was going to be so bad as this. If you won't save me, brother must. I can't go on with it."

Anita turned her head quickly to the door as if she feared her husband's appearance. Then she sat on the bed and took Barbara's wrists in her hands, with a strength the girl had not dreamed she possessed.

"Don't you dare appeal to Gilbert with his bad heart!" she said. "You might kill him. I've had everything taken away from me but Gilbert. You leave him to me!" Her breath came sharply, and she went on, lowering her voice to a piercing whisper. "You're bound in honor to Huntley Rhodes. You can't shame him by breaking off with him on the very eve of the marriage. I reckon even you think he's too good a man to be humiliated by a young girl. He would never lift his head up again. You've got to go on with it for his sake, and for your own, too, for Gilbert's and for mine." Anita steadied her voice, and then said: "I'm a sick woman. No one knows how I suffer, just because I'm not confined to my bed. I've never had anything I've wanted, and the things I've wanted more than anything in the world are Gilbert and my own home. I've never had them, because of you. Never since I came into this house has there been one day when you have not been with us under this roof! We've had no child, and Gilbert has made you his child! I was almost middle-aged when I was married to Gilbert, and since you've been growing up he's made you his young

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

sweetheart! For six years I've done my best for you, when every nerve in my body and soul has cried out against having you here. I've tried to be mother and sister to you, when you've been poisoning my life."

"Stop! Stop!" Barbara cried. "Oh, sister Anita, I didn't know you hated me like this!"

"Hate you? I don't hate you," Anita said, drearily. "I couldn't hate anything that belongs to Gilbert. I think I could love you if you had your own home and other interests besides Gilbert. If you were gone he'd have no one but me. Oh, you think it's hard on you because you haven't learned to love Huntley Rhodes yet. How would you like to be me, with my heart in the dirt at your brother's feet, afraid to speak, because he wouldn't hear what I'd say; afraid almost to look at him, for fear I'd find his eyes on you! And when I do speak my nerves run away with me and I say something I'd give my soul to recall—something that just pushes us farther apart. You don't know what suffering is!" Anita burst into wild weeping.

"Hush! Hush! Gilbert will hear you," Barbara whispered.

"He wouldn't care, unless he thought it was you crying," Anita sobbed. "Ever since you've grown up you've been sorry for yourself because it's dull here. But that's an easy kind of grief. Wait till you love and are helpless like I am."

"Don't cry any more, sister Anita," Barbara said. "I didn't understand. I reckon I never stopped to think whether you were happy or not. I reckon I just thought old married people didn't have much feeling one way or another."

Almost she forgot herself in a great pity for Anita—that poor, sick, fretful woman, who thought that she could yet make happiness out of the wreck of her own and her husband's lives. Barbara knew that Anita was seizing the nearest excuse for the failure of her marriage;

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

the real reason lay in the fact that Gilbert did not love her. As if Anita were reading her mind, she said:

"It's much more important for the husband to love the wife than for the wife to love the husband. You'll get on well because Huntley worships the ground you walk on."

"Please get up off the bed, sister Anita," Barbara said, painfully; "I can't seem to think when you are so close to me."

Anita arose and stood by the table. Barbara gazed straight in front of her, trying to put herself in Anita's place. It must be hard to be unloved—to see another person, even a sister, preferred to oneself. Perhaps it was the daily pain, the long repression, which had made Anita ill. It must have been a tragedy to see her husband change from a young man who sang before he came into the room into a spiritless aging man for whom life had no zest. Poor Anita must feel even more helpless in her situation than Barbara felt in hers. Anita deserved the release she wanted, even though that release would not give her what she longed for. Barbara must go on with her marriage. She was not only bound in honor to Rhodes, but she was bound in pity to Anita.

"Very well, sister Anita," she said; "I won't make any more scenes. I'll marry Mr. Rhodes next week. I won't make you any more trouble."

Anita silently picked up the candle and left the room. Barbara lay down again. She tried to push away all thought of herself, and fix her pity on Anita, seeing where Gilbert had failed his wife. Young as Barbara was, she had perception, which Gilbert, being a man, lacked. She vowed to keep her sympathy constantly alive for Rhodes.

"I'm caged," she said, drearily. "I'm caged for ever, but I shall see that poor Mr. Huntley is never so miserable as poor Anita."

V

MARRIED

THROUGHOUT the days that elapsed before the wedding Barbara and Anita avoided being alone together. During the household preparations they kept Mammy Kate or Sissy with them. When it was necessary to go to Charlottesville one or the other of them made some excuse to stay at home. It was generally Barbara who did the journeying; she liked to distract her mind by the spectacle of the shops and streets of the town. She went on long rides with Rhodes, who had given her a horse which she called Kirby after Rhodes's English home. Barbara always felt free-spirited on horseback; it was easier to talk to Rhodes then than at any other time. She did not realize that her underlying feeling was that she was not in danger of being embraced and that she could always gallop away.

The days before her wedding went by, sometimes slowly, sometimes at incredible speed. All the wedding plans had been made; they had been proposed by Rhodes, and agreed to by her without any change. She was glad that he never consulted Anita or Gilbert; she wanted her life to be as fully detached as possible from Anita's control. Since the weather was so perfect they were going first by automobile to Rives's Ferry, a little town on the way to Richmond. Rhodes had learned that Barbara's mother had been born in that place. He had rented, for a week, the very house in which she had lived, furnished much as it had been when she was a girl. Afterward they would

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

motor to New York, and then take a steamer for the Mediterranean. In the spring they would visit Rhodes's English relatives, and in the autumn they would come home. Barbara assented to every plan, gravely, sweetly, and quite as if it were some stranger's life she were arranging. She could not believe that it was Barbara Langworthy who was going to be married.

The day before the wedding she began to realize that it was herself to whom this great change was coming. Anita suddenly forgot her reticence, and took on the nervous animation that had been hers during the first days of the engagement.

"Honey, hush!" she said, gaily, at breakfast. "I reckon this will be the busiest day of our lives! Some of the neighbors have been sending in their presents. I just knew they'd 'most all come at the last minute. I'm crazy to see them. Gilbert, do you reckon I could drag out the nails myself?"

She laughed, and stretched her thin, sallow hand toward him. Gilbert tapped it with the handle of his knife and said, "I reckon you could, but I'm not going to have you tear your fingers."

Anita blushed with pleasure, and Barbara thought: "I reckon they will get on better without me. They haven't acted like that since the first year they were married."

Old Uncle 'Thias came in with a claw-hammer, followed by Mammy Kate and Sissy, eager to see the gifts. The nails were removed, and Anita said:

"Now you-all stand back and let Miss Barbara lift the things out; they're hers."

Barbara knelt over the boxes and took out the presents. She knew that they represented sincere well-wishing on the part of her neighbors, because she could see that they had been treasured by the owners, or else had been bought at the cost of some real sacrifice. There was a fine silver pitcher, a family piece, sent by the old Englishman who

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

was always going home and never would go. A note accompanied it in which he said, wistfully, that if she went to his part of England she must be sure to tell him how everything looked. Barbara vowed that she would get a camera and bring him home scores of pictures. There was the only piece of Dresden china which Mrs. Langrel possessed—but not a word with it. There was an elaborately knitted quilt which Leonard Hare's mother had spent months in making. Evidently, Barbara reflected, she had written to her son and asked permission to send it. Stephen Thornton's uncle sent her one of the two old tattered standards that had been carried by his regiment in the war.

"Oh," Barbara murmured, "I didn't know people could be so good to me."

"Course dey is good to you, honey, 'case dey loves you," Mammy Kate said, and immediately broke into loud howls in which Sissy joined her, while Uncle 'Thias, falling in with his family's emotions, began to sniffle and wipe his eyes.

"My baby's gwine away from me," declared Mammy Kate. "'Tain't no reason for me to live, with her a-drowndin' in de yocean and a-fallin' off dat big ship."

"Hold your tongues, all of you," commanded Gilbert. "What do you want to upset Miss Barbara for? You'd better clear up some of this mess here instead of yelling all over the place."

"I was gwine hold in 'twell de weddin'," apologized Mammy Kate.

"Well, mind you don't blubber at the wedding," Gilbert cautioned. "You've done your blubbering now, and any one that drops a tear will be run out of the drawing-room."

Barbara was unmoved by the display of the servants. She still knelt on the floor, not thinking of herself at all, but of her neighbors, and of all their lives must hold hidden of self-sacrifice and pain. Not one of them, she

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

told herself, but had wanted as much as she had to ride along the great red road into a world where happiness would be waiting. And, knowing their lives even superficially as she did, she was sure that none of them had got what they had wanted.

"Do get up, honey," Anita said. "You'll have cramped muscles if you sit there much longer. Uncle 'Thias will lift the boxes on the table for you."

Barbara unwrapped the various packages, and Anita carefully carried them to a table in the library where they would be on exhibition the next day. There was a piece of modern silver from Thornton and some Japanese vases from Hare. Lucia Streeter, rather to her surprise, had written her a letter wishing her all happiness. While she was still reading it Rhodes came. The others seemed to understand that he was bringing his bridal gift, and presently he and she were alone.

Rhodes clasped a string of pearls about her neck and led her to a mirror. "See how beautiful you look, my darling," he said. "The pearls could not make you lovelier than you are."

Barbara smiled at him in the mirror. "You are too good to me," she said. "Do you know that you have given me ten pieces of jewelry?"

"My mother gave them to you," he corrected.

He hoped that she would say that she valued them the more because they were his mother's. But she murmured, "I'll take such good, good care of them."

"Are you all worn out getting ready, my precious?" he asked her.

"Oh no! I've really not had a great deal of sewing done. I'm mighty anxious not to have your English kin think I'm just a little country girl," she said. "I thought we'd get some things in Paris."

"It will be wonderful in Paris," he said.

He began to describe the places they would see, and as he talked Barbara had a vision of the gaiety and charm of

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

Paris and of herself as a part of it. She smiled at him brilliantly.

"We'll have such good times," she said.

He drew her to him eagerly. "My little wife; oh, my little wife!" he breathed, ardently.

Barbara had learned to bear such moments by lying inert in his arms and thinking hard how good he was and how much she owed him. At first she had stiffened her body, but then Rhodes had instantly released her; later she had learned how to be passive and acquiescent.

Anita insisted that Barbara rest all the afternoon. When she came down to supper, bewildered with sleep and blinking at the lamp, Gilbert caught her in his arms.

"She looks like a baby," he said, impulsively. "I wish Rhodes had waited another year."

The animation in Anita's face died down, and Barbara said: "I'll seem a heap older when I've got my wedding-dress on. Just look, brother, at the big supper sister Anita has for me."

"I certainly mean to take care of you while I've got you," Anita said.

Barbara tried to talk, but presently she fell silent, and after a little Anita, too, stopped talking. All three were oppressed by the thought of the morrow. After the meal they sat in their old places in the drawing-room, in their old silence. Anita's few remarks seemed strangely out of place, and she soon abandoned any attempt to change the old order. At nine Barbara rose.

"Don't go," Gilbert said. "It's the last evening. Don't go, Babbie."

"You'll make her cry if you talk like that," Anita said. "But stay with your brother a little while if you can, Barbara. I'll go up-stairs."

She lingered, hoping they would ask her not to go, but they did not speak. She left the room, and then Barbara came over to her brother and sat on his knee, as she had so often done as a child. He stroked her hair, but

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

they found nothing to say to each other. Soon Barbara was increasingly conscious of Anita, lying in bed alone in the dark, listening, listening. After all, there was nothing to be gained by clinging to Gilbert. She got up and said:

"You must lock up, brother. I won't go around with you. I should be saying to myself it was for the last time." Her voice broke.

Gilbert patted her on the back, and said, hoarsely: "You'll come back often. You'll come over here every day. I couldn't get on without seeing you every day, Babbie."

"Yes, I'll come every day," Barbara said.

She went quickly up-stairs to her yellow room. She knew well that she would not sleep, and for half the night she sat at the window, looking out upon the dark fields she knew so well, saying farewells over and over again to all that had to do with Barbara Langworthy, hoping that somehow to-morrow there would be a new creature with different feelings, some one who was quite ready to be Barbara Rhodes. When she heard a sleepy cock crow she took off her clothes and lay down. She was still sure that she could not sleep, and she prepared herself for a wide-eyed vigil. At one moment she was vaguely eying the dim blur that was the wall; at what seemed to her the next she was starting up in bed, staring at Anita, who had just opened her blinds and was letting in a shaft of mellow sunlight which poured over the ugly carpet and lost itself in the open door.

"Forgive me for waking you, honey, but it's 'most ten," Anita said, "and you'll not have too much time. There's your breakfast on the table."

All that she liked was loaded on the tray.

"It's very good of you, sister Anita," Barbara murmured.

"They're fixing the drawing-room now," Anita went on. "Lots of the neighbors are helping. All the chrysanthemums in the place are here, I reckon, and the clergy-

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

man's wife is making a mighty pretty wedding-bell, just like one she was married under." Anita laid the tray across Barbara's knees, and went on: "I've said that not a soul's to see you, except Gilbert, of course, and you can have either Sissy or me to help you dress."

"I'll have you, sister Anita," Barbara murmured.

"I reckon Sissy 'd do something silly," Anita said in a constrained tone. "Honey, I clean forgot your bath. You take it, and I'll get fresh coffee and cakes."

"These will be hot enough," Barbara said, getting out of bed.

She had actually slept; she was actually awake, and it was her wedding-day. After that she moved like a person in a dream, all the time acutely aware that time was going fast, too fast. She lingered over her bath and her breakfast until Anita warned her that she would have to hurry. When she began to dress she was so clumsy that Anita had to call in Sissy, after all, and herself dashed downstairs to be sure that all was going well there. Gilbert came half a dozen times to the door to see if he could do anything for her. Mammy Kate came and insisted that she should be allowed to put on the veil for her own baby. She did it, blunderingly, and with tears. Sissy entered with the bridal bouquet Rhodes had sent, and when Barbara had taken it the maid looked at her with breathless ecstasy.

"Oh, Miss Barbara, you sho' is the beautifulest bride!" she cried. "Marse Huntley Rhodes will think you is sugar and try to eat you."

Anita came in, all ready, fussily drove the servants from the room, and fussily rearranged Barbara's veil.

"You'll have fifteen minutes to yourself, honey, before Gilbert comes for you. I've brought you your mother's prayer-book."

Barbara took the ivory-bound prayer-book; she had never handled it before, for her mother had kept it laid away. Anita hurried out, and then Gilbert came in. He

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

locked the door after him, and when he turned around she saw that he was crying. Round, fat tears were coursing down his cheeks, and his lips were working.

"Brother, don't!" she cried.

"The last thing mother said to me," Gilbert muttered, "was 'Take care of my baby.'"

"So you have," Barbara cried. "You've been the best brother in the world." She wiped his eyes with her handkerchief. "There! you've made my lovely lace handkerchief all wet, and they'll think I've been crying. I don't feel a bit like crying, brother."

She drew Gilbert to a seat beside her, and held his hand while he drew long, sobbing breaths. Her one concern was to get his face composed before they should go down-stairs. She had almost forgotten what they were going down-stairs for. She heard Anita coming along the hallway, and she sprang to the door and unlocked it. Anita entered with a suspicious look at Gilbert.

"Oh, here you are! I've been looking for you everywhere. Everybody's come, and the minister is in his surplice. And what do you reckon? Mrs. Langrel has offered to play the wedding-march. I didn't even suppose she'd come. She hasn't been to my house since she heard her boy had died. Stephen brought her. So you can come down-stairs to music, Barbara. Gilbert, I reckon you-all can start in five minutes. But mind you stand at the head of the stairs till the music begins."

Anita bustled out. Gilbert crossed to the mirror and straightened his tie. Barbara put a touch of powder on his shining nose and shook out her veil.

"Roses, prayer-book, handkerchief," she said, "I reckon I've got everything. Let me take your arm, brother. Maybe we ought to have practised going down-stairs. Do you think the five minutes are up? I'd as soon wait at the head of the stairs, anyway."

They went into the hall. Barbara had the feeling that Gilbert was clinging to her, rather than she to Gilbert.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

As she stood at the head of the stairs she got a glimpse into the drawing-room. Little, red-lipped, black-browed Mary Thornton stood at the door. People were sitting there much as they sat in church, only it was not quite so subdued, she thought. Then the music sounded, and she began to walk down-stairs, rather disturbed for fear her train would catch on the stair-rod. She reached the drawing-room door and saw that the room was full—much fuller than church. People whom she scarcely knew must be there.

Up in front of the long windows was an arch of white chrysanthemums, and hanging from it the bell the clergyman's wife had made. It was the least bit crooked and it did not appear to be strongly affixed. The clergyman was standing under it, and at one side was Huntley Rhodes. Barbara knew that he saw only her; his eyes measured her footsteps. But she kept thinking of the wedding-bell, and wondering if it would fall on her head.

She stood before the clergyman; Rhodes stepped beside her, and Gilbert gave back a pace. She began to wonder how she could hold the roses and prayer-book in one hand when the ring had to be put on. The clergyman began to speak and she gave a little start, because the words he was saying were not the words he used in church. She stopped listening until she heard the clergyman's voice ceasing, to be followed by that of Rhodes, saying in a deeper tone than usual, "I will."

Presently she heard some one whom she did not really think was Barbara Langworthy saying, "I will," and then repeating after the clergyman, "I, Barbara, take thee, Huntley, for my lawful husband . . . death us do part." She was uncertainly holding the roses and the prayer-book in her right hand while Rhodes was putting a ring on her wedding-finger. The trouble she had with the contents of her right hand made her think of the wedding-bell again. She gave it a hasty glance; it certainly was perilously swaying. Was it time to kneel down? And

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

now Rhodes was getting up; he was kissing her; Gilbert and Anita were kissing her. The clergyman, who had christened and confirmed her and buried so many dear to her, kissed her cheek and said:

"I wish you all joy, Mrs. Rhodes—my dear Miss Barbara!"

Little Barbara Langworthy was Mrs. Rhodes. Little Barbara Langworthy was married.

VI

FREEDOM

BARBARA stood beside Rhodes under the wedding-bell, receiving the good wishes of their friends. She had forgotten all about the wedding-bell until Rhodes whispered to her to thank the clergyman's wife for making it. She stood there, gravely smiling, saying the right things, and all the time counting—counting the number of people present, those who had come to speak to her, those who were still to come, those who had already gone into the dining-room for the informal breakfast. She felt a strange sense of haste, as if she had a great deal to do in a very short time. Gilbert kept drifting back to her every few minutes to ask if she were tired, or if he could do anything for her, and to assure her that she could soon have something to eat. Gilbert had somehow become obsessed with the idea that Barbara required food. He reported again and again that Anita was getting people into the dining-room, and he did this so indefatigably that the guests who heard him cut short their good wishes under the impression that Barbara had been fasting according to some high-church scruple, and needed immediate succor.

Rhodes was at his best, happy, but not too jaunty, talkative, careful of Barbara, already protecting her, she felt. He took her to the dining-room and she cut the bridal cake. For all Gilbert's solicitude, she ate very little and was very white. Rhodes responded to toasts, made a proper speech, and, she recognized, was all that a

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

bridegroom should be. But Barbara could not realize that he was the man with whom she was presently going away. After what seemed a very long time Anita whispered to her:

"Huntley ordered the motor for half past two. You'd better slip away as soon as you can. I'll come up and help you if you need me."

Barbara went up-stairs. Some one ran after her with her bridal bouquet, warning her, laughingly, that she must not forget to throw it as she came down. She passed into her own room and sat at the window. She could hear the movements of the horses being harnessed by Uncle Thias to take the guests home again. She could see Mammy Kate and her helpers carrying away the dishes from the dining-room, across the little court to the kitchen, which was full of negroes come to share in the remnants of the wedding-feast. Two or three of them were singing a plaintive melody, a song of parting, and she remembered having heard it when Gilbert was married.

The door opened suddenly, and Barbara blanched and sprang to her feet. It was Anita, who laughed uneasily at the girl's terrified face.

"What's the matter, honey? Did I scare you? I forgot to knock. Lawsy me, child, you've not even got your veil off!"

Barbara still stared at her, white and trembling.

"What ever is the matter, Barbara?" Anita said, a little impatiently. "You mustn't get hysterical, you know, and do anything absurd before all these people, waiting to see you off."

She began to undo Barbara's veil. The girl submitted passively. When Anita had unhooked her dress she stepped out of it. Her arms, as Anita inadvertently touched them, were cold, and she still trembled. Anita helped her silently, looking at her fleetingly now and again. When Barbara was putting on her traveling-dress Anita said:

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"Oh, I do wish it were this time three months; then you'd feel so different."

Barbara made no reply, and Anita went on in a worried, embarrassed tone:

"I believe perhaps I know what's the matter, Barbara. But there's nothing to be afraid of in—in marriage. There aren't any—horrors, even for such a young girl as you. Any girl who is married to a gentleman who loves her has nothing to be afraid of in marriage. After you get used to it it is just like any other fact—food or drink, sunshine or rain."

Barbara, still trembling, went to the mirror and began to put on her hat, making stumbling, ineffective stabs with the pins.

"I do wish I were your mother for five minutes, child," Anita said with real concern. "Then I could make you know you have nothing to fear." She paused, then said: "Let me hold your coat for you, honey, and put on your gloves. It was a lovely breakfast, wasn't it? Everybody had a good time at your wedding. Now just pull yourself together till you get into the car. Then you'll have a long ride in this nice air in which to compose yourself."

Barbara drew on her gloves and smiled faintly. "I reckon I'm tired, sister Anita," she said. "The breakfast lasted so long, and I never did get so tired of speechmaking in my life."

"There! You're looking like a real somebody now. Don't forget your hand-bag. Gilbert's got your dress-suit case in the car already, and your trunk went by train this morning. Law, honey, don't forget the bouquet; you have to throw it when you're half-way down-stairs."

Anita pushed her gently out of the room. Barbara turned back on the threshold. Always she had hated the ugly yellow walls, the staring valance of the bed, but now she dreaded to leave them. Here was a place where she could always lock the door and be alone, and now she could never again lock her door. Anita preceded her down

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

the hall, and knocked at the room where Rhodes had gone to dress.

"All ready, Huntley," she called. Then she added to Barbara, "I'm going to slip down the back way so as to get a good view of you."

Barbara stood alone in the hall. She heard Rhodes coming, and she turned to smile up at him tremblingly.

"Barbara!" he cried. "How matronly my little wife looks already! You're five years older than you were in white!"

She submitted to his embrace, and he asked, "Are you tired, darling?"

"Not very," she said. "Are you?"

"I—oh, I never felt so fit in my life. I feel as if I wanted to get on the roof of the world and shout."

She felt vaguely afraid of his emotion, and she dropped her eyes and said, "I reckon we'd better go down."

"Quite so, dearest. Put your arm in mine; we've got to make this trip together—and every other, sweetheart, every other."

They began their quick walk down-stairs, and the waiting faces below them broke into smiles. Nearly all middle-aged faces, Barbara thought, and perhaps they were trying to be just as brave as she was.

"They've got their hands full of rice," Rhodes whispered. "Better get your own hands free, darling. Give me that pocket-book thing of yours, and throw the bouquet."

Barbara noted where the two or three girls who were present were standing, and threw the bouquet in their direction. There was a laugh when little Mary Thornton caught it. They rushed the rest of the way down-stairs and to the front door in a shower of rice, Rhodes guarding her face with his arm. The servants were on the drive, laden with old shoes, laughing and crying and calling to Barbara. Gilbert stood by the motor-car. Barbara broke away from Rhodes and clung to her brother.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"Oh, Gilbert, Gilbert, come with me!" she cried. "I can't go alone; I can't!"

Rhodes's face paled. Then he took Barbara from her brother and put her gently in the car.

"Don't be afraid, my darling. He shall come with us," he said. Then he spoke to Gilbert, "Get in, old fellow, and ride a way with us!" To the guests on the steps he added, "Any one want to ride a mile with us?"

"No," some one shouted, laughingly, as Gilbert got in. "Get out, Langworthy. No fair tagging the bridal couple."

"Lean out, Barbara, and tell them good-by," Rhodes said.

Barbara leaned forward and smiled and waved her hands. For a moment she saw nothing but the crowd of smiling faces on the steps. Then her gaze concentrated on Anita's face, hard and baleful.

"Good-by all," shouted Rhodes. "For Heaven's sake have pity on the veneer of the car!"

There was a shout of farewell, a shower of rice and shoes, and the car darted down the drive. Barbara Rhodes had set out on her wedding-journey.

She leaned back in a corner, clinging tightly to her brother's hand. Rhodes sat on one of the chairs in front of her, his eyes fixed steadily on the chauffeur's broad back. It was not so that he had expected to begin his married life. Gilbert looked uneasily at the floor of the car, coughing occasionally in an embarrassed way. Slowly Barbara sat forward and put her hand on her husband's arm.

"Huntley," she said.

It was the first time she had called Rhodes by his Christian name. He swung round in his seat and faced her.

"Yes, dear?" he said.

"Huntley, you are so good to me, my—my dear," Barbara said. "Any other man in the world would have

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

picked me up bodily and put me in the car, and slapped my hands, and pitched Gilbert on the steps."

Gilbert laughed uncertainly.

"It's just that I've never left home before," Barbara said, "and I got afraid. But we'll drop brother at—at Charlottesville and let him ride home on the train."

Rhodes's pain lightened; he spoke quietly: "Of course, dear, I understand. But we needn't drop Gilbert at Charlottesville, unless to send a telegram to Anita. Why shouldn't he come with us to Rives's Ferry, and stop a day or two? Would you like that, dear?"

"Truly it's not at all necessary," Barbara said.

But Rhodes knew that she wanted her brother. "Why shouldn't you come, Gilbert? I remember hearing that when my uncle married his mother-in-law went with him and his wife on their wedding-journey. Come on, be our mother-in-law. You'd like to spend a day or so in the house your mother was born in, wouldn't you?"

"I reckon I'd better not," hesitated Gilbert.

"I'd like to have brother with us, Huntley," Barbara said. "I'd love to have him the first person to visit us after we were married. But it's all right if he has to go, because I feel ever and ever so much more married than I did when this car started."

Rhodes smiled back at her. She was a dear child, and she was fond of him. Give him time and he would take Gilbert's place with her, and give him more time and she would learn to look on him really as a husband.

"We've got to have Gilbert," he said. "I promised you we'd have lots of guests, and why shouldn't we begin at once?"

"Come along back here and sit with us," Barbara said with a pretty air of command. "No, not by brother; between brother and me."

Rhodes sat as she appointed, and she leaned her head against his sleeve and whispered, shyly:

"Quite comfy?"

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"Quite comfy," he said.

Life seemed a much better thing to both of them than it had promised five minutes before. They reached Charlottesville, where Gilbert spent several minutes sending a telegram which should advise Anita where he was but prevent neighborhood gossip from finding out. While he was gone Barbara talked easily and cheerfully to Rhodes, telling him the way she had felt about the crooked wedding-bell and what she thought of his toasts.

Then they rolled on through country not familiar to Barbara. Her husband and brother kept pointing out places which had figured in the history of both of them, and so the time went quickly enough till it was dark. After that the two men made conversation about the places they were passing but could not see. At six o'clock they arrived at Rives's Ferry, and, passing through the town, they came to the dark outlines of a park. They swept up a magnificent driveway and reached suddenly a long, low house blazing with light.

"Oh," Barbara said, "it looks like home! It's so much nicer than a hotel; my own mother's first home! Thank you so much, Huntley, for coming here!"

The door opened, and they were received by an old colored couple who had known Mrs. Langworthy when she was a child. The old woman led Barbara up-stairs to a room all white and lavender, with a fire burning on the hearth and with bowls of roses in every available space.

"Ole Mis' Barbara's mammy, yo' grandmammy, she sleep here," the old woman said; "and next to it is a dressin'-room where yo' grandpappy dressed hisse'f and shaved. I done tote his shavin'-water. He sleep in the room next the dressin'-room, where Mist' Rhodes is puttin' his things now."

Barbara bent down to the fire and warmed hands suddenly cold. "Where did my mother sleep?" she asked.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"Mis' Barbara she sleep here, too, when yo' grandpappy is died. You-all come down to supper pretty soon, honey," the old woman said, shuffling out of the room.

Barbara's trunk had been unpacked and her clothes hung in the old-fashioned press. She chose a blue gown which Rhodes had admired. When she was dressed she sat down in front of the fire and tried to picture her mother as a young girl. Presently a knock sounded on the dressing-room door, and Barbara started to her feet.

"Come—come in," she said, unsteadily.

Rhodes entered, dressed for dinner. He held a key in his hand.

"Here, dearest," he said, "is the key to the dressing-room. I want you to know that you are to keep the door locked as long as you like."

Barbara did not take the key. She turned away from him and stared into the fire. Then she said, still without looking at him, "The door needn't be locked, Huntley, but—but let it stay shut for a while—let it stay shut until brother has gone."

"You've got on my favorite dress," he said. "Thank you, dear."

Barbara suddenly ran to him and put her arms about his neck. "Huntley dear," she said, "I do think you are the very sweetest person in the world."

"I want you to be happy—happy and free, my darling," he said.

"Please kiss me," Barbara said. "I've never asked you for a kiss before, but I do want one now—or maybe two."

He was very happy, and he did not spoil the moment with a caress which might have frightened her.

"I want you to look at this room," Barbara said without embarrassment; "it's so lovely with the roses you put in it. Mother used to sleep here. Should—should you like to sit by the fire with me, Huntley?"

He did want to, but he meant to make the most of her mood by yielding everything and taking nothing.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"I should indeed, dear," he said, "but old Gilbert is waiting for us down-stairs."

They went down arm in arm, and when Gilbert saw them his anxious face relaxed into a relieved smile. Rhodes observed it with some irritation, but his kind expression remained unclouded. They had a gay dinner, and in the evening, when conversation began to grow fitful Rhodes routed out a victrola belonging to the occupants of the house and the three listened to popular music until after ten o'clock. Then Barbara sprang to her feet.

"I can't stand that screeching another minute," she said. "I'm going to bed. Good night, Huntley dear and brother dear." She kissed her husband and her brother and ran lightly up-stairs.

The men smoked and talked for an hour, and then Gilbert said, heavily, "Well, I reckon I'd better go to bed."

"Mind you don't wake Barbara as you pass the door," cautioned Rhodes. "I want her to rest well; she's had a trying day."

Gilbert held out his hand. "I don't know that I ever told you," he remarked, "but I like you as a brother-in-law. Good night."

"Night," Rhodes said.

Barbara lay in bed, looking dreamily at the fire. She felt more at peace than she had at any time since her engagement, or, indeed, since she had begun to fret over the dullness of her lot. Life was going to be good, after all. When she heard Rhodes in his dressing-room she shivered a little. Then she determinedly blew a kiss in his direction.

"He's a good man," she said, "and I'm a lucky girl."

The next morning she was down first, and was putting a rosebud at Rhodes's plate when he entered the dining-room.

"Are you looking for Mrs. Rhodes?" she asked, coquettishly.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

He seized her in a grip that hurt. All he had gained he lost; all her old fear came back. Then Gilbert entered, and the difficult moment was over.

They spent the next two days motoring about the country to places which Gilbert knew well and of which he had often heard his mother speak. It was perfect Indian Summer—golden, mellow weather that gave a specious effect of intending to last for ever. On the morning of the third day Gilbert said that he must go back.

"Let's take one last drive together, then," Rhodes said. "We'll probably go on to Washington to-morrow, for this perfect weather can't last."

"Oh, do, brother," Barbara said. "Don't start back till the afternoon. Let's drive over again to the church where mother was married."

"The chauffeur's feeling peckish this morning," Rhodes said, "so I'll drive, and you and Barbara can sit in the back and criticize me."

So they made a holiday of the parting, and toward noon they set off for the old church of which Barbara had spoken. Rhodes drove, and the brother and sister sat in the back, speaking little and holding hands. Once Gilbert whispered:

"Finest fellow in the world."

Barbara nodded and looked out of the window, tears obscuring her eyes. Yes, yes, he was; but she wanted to return with Gilbert. They were going down a hill, by a stone fence, and suddenly the stone fence seemed to be traveling very fast and gravel struck hard on the windows of the car. Instinctively Barbara closed her eyes.

When she opened them again she was lying on a man's coat in a field, and two or three men and a frightened woman were looking down on her.

"Are you hurt?" some one asked.

Barbara struggled to her feet and looked dazedly about her. She was standing at the bottom of the hill, on the far side of the stone fence. On the near side lay the car,

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

a broken, twisted mass. Two or three hundred yards away she saw two groups of men, each carrying a burden.

"My brother—Mr. Rhodes—are they hurt?" she cried.

The woman began to cry. "Don't say anything, you poor child," she said. "The minister's coming."

A tall young man in a long coat and with a shocked sad face hurried up to her. He took her hand in his. "You must be brave," he said.

"They are badly hurt?" Barbara whispered.

"God will give you strength," the clergyman said.

Then Barbara knew. "They are dead!" she said. "They are dead! Anita will never forgive me and I will never forgive myself."

Time meant nothing to her. She put herself in the hands of those about her. She never knew who it was that sent the poor broken bodies of her husband and brother back to Grassmere. She never learned who it was that told Anita. She forgot the name of the clergyman who accompanied her as far as Charlottesville. She greeted blankly the hushed sympathetic neighbors who met her and took her back to Grassmere. It was Mammy Kate who met her at the door and who led her to the drawing-room. Anita stood in the doorway, and behind her were two coffins covered with late flowers.

"But for you," Anita said, "I should have my husband. You are a robber, and I hate you as I never hated any one in this world."

Then feeling came rushing in upon Barbara. She knew her loss, and Anita's; she felt that her sister-in-law's accusation was just. The sudden wave of pain was too much for her. She fell to the floor, unconscious.

It was days later before she came back to consciousness. All she knew at first was that her hair had been cut short and that the world had somehow changed. Then, slowly, realization returned. She understood why Anita did not come to see her, and why Mammy Kate wept, and Sissy looked at her with frightened eyes. She learned that for

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

many days Huntley Rhodes had been lying in the churchyard on the windy hill, and that her brother was lying beside his parents and brothers in the plot at the end of that grove where, ages before, she used to swing her hammock. Her grief, as her strength grew, was pitiable. She felt remorseful about Rhodes; she knew she could have been kinder. But it was for her brother she sorrowed. She had lost the only person in the world whom she loved.

Six weeks after her widowhood, when she was able to lie on a sofa by the window, Anita came to see her. She stood in her black dress by the door, as far away from Barbara as she could get, her face pinched and old.

"I came to give you a chance to make your plans," she said. "I don't want you to stay here."

"I can go to—to Mr. Rhodes's house, I suppose," Barbara said.

"He hasn't got any house. We have been very much misinformed about his affairs. That house belonged to his elder brother, who claims it. What money he had came from his mother. Most of that he has lost in the same investment where I lost mine. There is about thirty thousand dollars left and the personal property. The jewelry he gave you; you're sure of that. Of the thirty thousand, his brother gets twenty. English people never give up their rights in money, so there's no need for you to expect it."

"I don't expect it," said Barbara, wearily.

"You'll have ten thousand dollars," Anita said. "That is the price of my husband's life."

Barbara was moved to make a wild appeal to Anita for pity, but, looking at her sister-in-law's face, she knew the futility of any hope of its softening. She waited a little while and then she said:

"As soon as I am strong enough I will go North to some big college and finish my education. Then I can teach.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

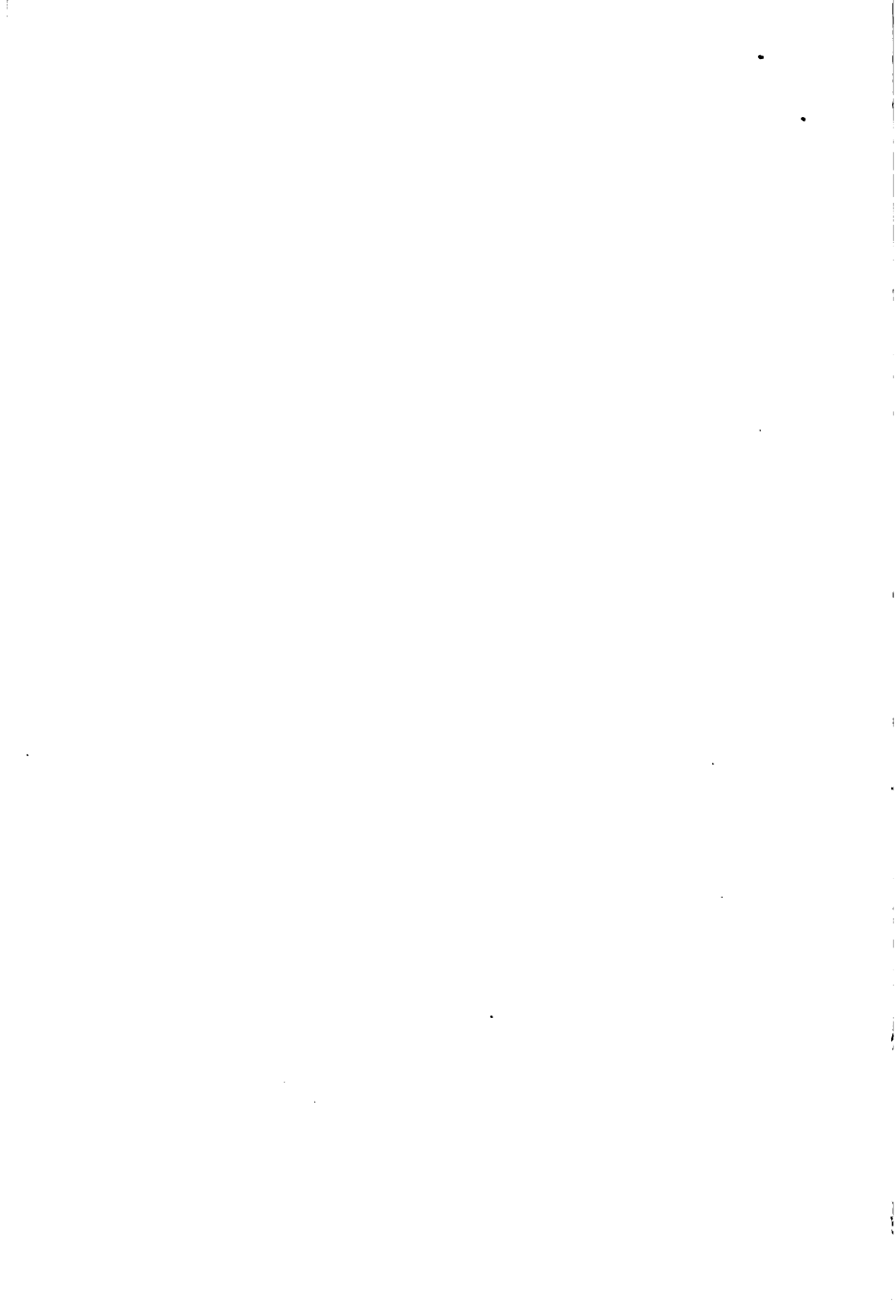
Maybe, sister Anita, I can make up to you a little some day. I'll always be ready if you need me."

"I'll never need you," Anita said, sharply. "My flesh crawls from the very thought of you. You've got what you have always wanted, Barbara Langworthy—freedom—and you've made me pay for it."

She went out of the room, and Barbara lay back brokenly on her pillows, looking at the hideous yellow wall. After a long time she said:

"Freedom! Yes, that's what I've got—and, oh, poor Mr. Rhodes; oh, my dear, dear brother. I stole my freedom from you both!"

Part II
STARS



VII

LOVERS

BARBARA RHODES came out of the old red-brick academy and walked slowly down the sagging brick path, carrying, bound up in a strap, a pile of yellow-backed exercise-books. Kirby, the horse which her husband had given her ten years before, was tied in a corner of the yard. He heard her coming and lifted his head with a questioning neigh.

"Here I am, old boy," she said. "Sorry to be late."

She swung into the saddle, fastened the strap to the pommel, and cantered down the old quiet street toward home. Home was precisely what it had been ten years before—Grassmere. As soon as Barbara had been able to she had left her sister-in-law's house and had gone to the University of Chicago to study. The only reason she had chosen that place was that Leonard Hare, in one of his letters, had mentioned a Mrs. Farley who had graduated from the university and had spoken with singular enthusiasm of the advantages it offered to women. Barbara had gone there early in January, and had worked so faithfully that she had got her degree three years and a half later.

In all that time she had gained no friends and few acquaintances. Advances had been made to her, for there were those who found appealing the white young widow in her deep mourning, with the sweet, sad, drawling voice. Barbara had been, not repellant, but simply not there. The shock she had suffered had been profound;

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

a morbid sense of guilt had led her to be afraid of people—afraid that she might bring harm to them, and afraid that they might hurt her. She had been like some one in a high tower, looking from afar upon the business of the world, but having no concern with it. She had sometimes mused over the fact that the change she had so longed for had come, that she was in the busy mart of life, and yet she dared not take any advantage of it. She felt that for a long time she must walk softly, with closed eyes. There had been in her mind some vague idea of expiation; if she asked nothing for herself and worked hard during her college course, then she might go away somewhere and be useful, and perhaps content.

She had, therefore, thrown herself fiercely into her work, and the students who tried to know her and could not thought that she was indifferent, bloodless, promising to be one of the remote scientific women who give all their energy to showing what women might have been intellectually through all the ages, if only they had been allowed a fair chance. As soon as her would-be friends took that point of view about her they gave up considering her as one of themselves. They admired her and they abstracted her from ordinary human concerns.

During the last year of her college life Barbara had felt a change in herself. She had lived for so long in a state of morbid and frozen brooding that at first she could not believe in any alteration. Yet gradually she found herself looking out on her world with expectant eyes. Why should she remain aloof in her tower while there were flesh-and-blood people about her, happy, hopeful, not at all like the neighbors near Grassmere with their lives all lived? She had been amid youth for four years, and had not dared drink it in, because she had been bound, remorsefully, to the past. But all her grief could not bring back her brother and Rhodes; and she had a whole life left in which she could atone, and also be happy. She found herself looking forward to that life. And first she

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

had bestirred herself about a position. Because of her excellent university record several opportunities had been offered her. She had chosen some poorly paid work as assistant in history in the university because it would keep her in the city and she felt that she wanted to drink deep now of people and things.

There had come a letter from Anita which had turned back her steps from the great road of the world and set her again in a by-path. Barbara had not an especially good memory; but at the first reading that letter carved itself in her mind, never to be erased.

You said you would come to me if I ever needed you [the letter ran], and I need you now. I am almost bedridden. I need some one in the house with me at nights, and I will not have a negro and I cannot afford a nurse. As I neither wish nor can afford to support you I have arranged for you to teach in the academy at Charlottesville; they are glad to have a Southern woman with a Northern degree. You can go in every day on the train, or ride Kirby. I may be a long time dying, but, whether long or short, you need not expect to gain anything by my death. I intend to leave Grassmere to one of my own kin. You come here simply to work off a little of your long debt to me.

Your brother's widow,

ANITA,

In Barbara's mind there had been no question of rebellion. She was in bond to Anita, and it was morally impossible for her to forfeit. Her widening, lightening horizon simply contracted again, and darkened. Her hopeful heart grew leaden, and she felt as if her very eyes and hair were fading, and her feet dragging. She had gone back to Grassmere, and she had been there for six years. She had so often ridden on Kirby between the academy and her home that she could have gone her route blindfolded. As she cantered homeward under the young spring trees, she felt that neither the road nor her life could possibly hold any surprises.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

A little way outside the town she came in sight of a small frame house surrounded by a tumble-down fence. The gate had fairly firm posts, and on one of these, eagerly awaiting her, sat a tangle-haired four-year-old boy.

"I'd almost forgotten Bobby," Barbara thought. She rode up to him and took him on her knee. "I've got nothing for you, to-day, I'm afraid, Bobby," she said, "nothing but a kiss."

"That will do," Bobby said, amiably.

She kissed him, and he put his arms about her neck and lisped a sweet formula that always passed between them.

"Do you love me ath well ath you did yesterday?"

"Better, sweetheart."

She kissed him again and put him back on the post.

"To-morrow, sweetheart," Bobby said.

"To-morrow, boy," she returned. She rode on, but the smile on her lips soon faded. "Ah!" she said, aloud, "two minutes of Bobby a day don't make up for the rest."

Barbara found her temple of expiation a cheerless, even sinister place. Life looked to her precisely as it had before she married Rhodes. She had a little more spending-money, a little more physical freedom, but, if anything, less spiritual freedom. Her world was bounded by Anita, who, for all that she was practically bedridden, stood at the four points of the compass, defying Barbara to reach out in any particular. Ten years before Barbara had felt as if the world were marching on to adventure, leaving her for ever behind among her middle-aged neighbors. More than ever they seemed to her without regrets, or hopes, or curiosities, or any forward-looking gleam. She was afraid that she would grow like them, unaccountably empty of anything that could move the mind or ignite the heart. Sometimes she detected, under their ossifications, the struggles and anguishes of youth, and then more than ever she longed for freedom. She knew that she could handle her life better than she had ten years before.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

Time had taught her something, but she could never work out what she had learned so long as Anita lived.

It was in the spring that she particularly felt rebellion surging in her veins, and never more so than during this homeward ride. Everything about her seemed putting forth new spontaneous impulses. The young green leaves were grouping themselves into new patterns; the grass was as fresh as if it had never grown before; the new crops were springing. Kirby, under her, was forgetting his fourteen years and taking the road like a young horse. She saw on the path a pair of would-be lovers, thrilling at the first pretended accidental touch of hands. When she passed them Kirby was surprised by a sharp flick of the whip. Barbara was unspeakably tired of being a spectator. A little farther along the road she came upon a couple of lovers sitting concealed, as they thought, behind a rock. Their lips and hands were close. Barbara drew in her breath sharply, forgetting herself, because one of the two was little, red-lipped, black-browed Mary Thornton, who long ago had caught her bridal bouquet and who was now her favorite pupil. She was not like the other students, for there was something reserved and ornate and troubling about her. Barbara's own response to the spring was swallowed up in her teacher-like criticism of Mary; the child was too young for this sort of thing.

She rode on with knitted brow, past the house of the old Englishman who never spoke now of going home, because he knew that his longest journey would be to the graveyard beside the gray-towered church on the windy slope; and past the house of Colonel Thornton, who had married a youngish wife and was trying to cheat time. She met Mrs. Langrel driving in her low carriage, as always, guarded by silence. At the sight of her Barbara had a clear and profound impression of the melancholy which is below all surfaces, and of a unity which is deeper than any transiency. Just before she reached Grass-

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

mere she met Mrs. Hare walking on the path by the road. The old woman drew back with a little frightened cough. She gave the impression always of one with something to hide and to fear, the result of her long contest to reform her pathetic old drunkard of a husband. Barbara nodded reassuringly, and called out a few words of greeting.

Reluctantly she finished the last homeward stretch. She foresaw with disagreeable vividness what was to happen next. She would canter up the drive. At the sound of Kirby young 'Thias would come smiling and shuffling from the kitchen, ready to take the horse. Sissy, married now, and ruling in the place of Mammy Kate, would run out to ask her if she wouldn't like a cup of tea, and one or two of Sissy's black brood would crawl from under the steps and grin shyly at her. She would enter and go to the library; the drawing-room had never been used since the day of the double funeral. Anita would be lying on the sofa where 'Thias had carried her in the morning.

"You're late," Anita would say, her nostrils pinching, her eyes averted, as if she could not bear to look at Barbara.

"Not very, sister Anita, am I?"

"You're always late. You hate to come into this house. You hate the very sight of me."

"Sometimes the girls keep me late at school," Barbara would reply. "Can I do anything for you?"

"Turn me on the other side. Sissy pretends she doesn't hear the bell when I ring. I get so tired lying here, but no one cares. No one wants to do a hand's turn for me since you killed Gilbert."

Barbara would lift her, and then say that she must change her dress.

"You want to get away from me as soon as you can," Anita would retort. "You'd leave me, if you dared, for ever. Here I lie, day after day, and never hear or see anything that goes on. Ain't you any news for me?"

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

As Anita had grown older and more of an invalid she had relapsed into the common form of speech her mother had always used. Barbara would sit beside her and tell her the little trifles she had seen and heard. Then she would change from her riding-habit to a black evening gown. She would go down-stairs, and she and young Thias would get Anita into the dining-room, where she would sit at the head of the table. Her movements were uncertain and she always spilled the coffee when she served it, but she never relinquished to Barbara any duty which would seem to delegate household authority.

Then Anita would be carried up-stairs and put to bed. Barbara would sit beside her and read aloud till her voice failed. Then the two would sit silent, as they had when Gilbert was alive, with nothing to say to each other. At bedtime Anita would command, sharply:

"You can leave me alone now."

Barbara would rise, with dreary relief, and as she opened the door this invariable dialogue would occur:

"You know you ain't ever to have Grassmere after I'm dead?"

Barbara would wonder for the thousandth time how Anita had divined that Grassmere had come to mean so much to her—that next to her passion for freedom her nearest desire was to own Grassmere, which had been so long the home of the Langworthys, where all those of her blood were buried, and where every tree and flower was sweet with memories of all she held dear. She never heard Anita's words without fierce revolt, but she invariably replied, calmly:

"I know it, sister Anita."

"You know I'm going to leave it to Stephen Thornton?"

"Yes."

"You ain't to go whining to him to try and get it back?"

"You've the right to leave your property where you please, sister Anita. I sha'n't protest."

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"Good night."

"Good night, sister Anita. I hope you will rest well."

Then Barbara would lock up the house and, going to her yellow room, would undress, repeating to herself with a tender, sad smile Gilbert's old formula, "Well, thank God, another day over without much bad luck—at least, without any we can't stand."

Every day the familiar pictures, the familiar dialogues, came out to meet her. They were an unpleasant legion of memories besieging the portal of her mind, insisting on storming it, and always she yielded to them. Yet, after all, this day held a surprise, for as she trotted up the driveway she saw a woman sitting on the porch who was not one of her neighbors. Young 'Thias took Kirby, remarking, superfluously:

"Quality at de house, Miss Barbara."

Barbara went up the steps, and the visitor came forward to meet her, saying, "I am afraid you don't remember me."

She was large and blond and sweet and self-assured. In her Barbara recognized Lucia Streeter.

"Indeed I do remember you," she said. "You're Miss Streeter—if it still is Miss Streeter."

Lucia blushed. "Yes, it still is—for the present," she said.

"Won't you sit down?" Barbara said. "Or would you rather come inside? It was so nice of you to wait for me. I expect sister Anita must be having one of her bad days or you would be with her."

Lucia sank into a rocking-chair. "I saw her just a minute, but she wanted to speak privately to Stephen—to Mr. Thornton," Lucia said.

"I didn't know he was here. He doesn't often run down from Richmond," Barbara remarked. "I reckon I haven't seen him six times in the six years I've been back."

"But have you not been told?" Lucia asked. "He's leaving Richmond and coming to practise law in Char-

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

lottesville. He and his partner have dissolved their relationship."

Barbara remembered to have heard that Thornton and his partner had not got on well. Thornton had a passion for pure justice. He could grasp the special genius of a person or a situation, regarding it with illuminating clearness, and thus was eminently fitted to live a life outside self. But that particular gift did not square always with judicial decisions in his favor. Too often he sided with the under dog, and refused cases which would mean money and a bad flavor upon his moral palate. This point of view did not jibe with that of his partner, a man who used self-interest as the source of many workable and profitable illusions.

"Mr. Thornton's so splendidly honest. One admires it in him," Lucia said, warmly.

Barbara remembered having heard that Lucia's grandfather had served in the penitentiary for some felony, and that his conviction had been just. If his granddaughter thought so, she would appreciate all the more Thornton's record. Sissy appeared with a tea-tray, and at the sight of it the two women insensibly relaxed, abandoning a little of the reserve natural to their slight acquaintance and their ten years' absence from each other.

"I am glad to see tea," Lucia said. "We walked over from the Rutland place. Father and I have rented it for a time. He hates hotels."

"Do you think this place has changed very much?" Barbara asked, taking her place before the tray.

"Oh no. Cream and sugar, please. No, every tree and every person look the same. You don't appear a day older than you did ten years ago, Mrs. Rhodes."

"I feel a century older," Barbara said, handing Lucia her tea. "If I'd been all over the world, as you have, perhaps the time would have gone quickly."

"You've been through so much," said Lucia. Her sympathy was rather perfunctory. Her mind was on

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

pleasant things, and she did not care to think of that loss.

"Mr. Hare wrote you that I still have Bayonne?" she added. "I wish I'd brought him down with me. I'm going to ride a lot. Stephen is taking a vacation, and we'll ride together."

Barbara's ear was quick to detect vocal shades, and it seemed to hear that there was a shade of proprietorship in Lucia's tone. Involuntarily she looked a question.

"Yes," Lucia answered, "we are engaged, Stephen and I. Father and I were a lot in Richmond this winter; indeed, we've been there off and on for ten years."

"I am glad," Barbara said, holding out her hand.

She always welcomed a romance, for she had known so few, even as a spectator. Her eyes and voice kindled with a sympathy which moved Lucia.

"It's awfully good of you. I believe you are glad, and I want the people he's known all his life to like me," Lucia replied.

"I only wonder it didn't happen long ago," Barbara said.

"Stephen's been so absorbed in his work. He says he always wanted to have something to offer his sweetheart before he let himself fall in love."

"Still, I don't see how he could wait so long," said Barbara, prettily.

"I don't mind telling you," confessed Lucia, "that I've been more or less in love with Stephen ever since I first saw him, though, of course, I wouldn't let myself think so. I like big, brown men. He's so strong, too. But, after all, we've wasted ten years."

"I sometimes think," mused Barbara, "that if anything ever happened that interested me I'd pretend that it had been happening a long, long time, so as to make up for all the empty years before."

Then she colored; she was afraid that Lucia might guess that she was thinking of love. For Barbara's shy girlish-

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

ness had long since passed. She longed for love now as frankly as she had longed for freedom ten years before; or rather, the freedom she now wanted was to take the form of thralldom to some love. She was not pretty, but she was at least as good-looking as Lucia Streeter—as plenty of girls without Lucia Streeter's wealth, who won lovers. The world was crowded with men; and she, still young, and infinitely fuller of vitality and curiosity and daring than she had been ten years before—she was passed by.

There was no one to love her, and no one she could love unrestrainedly except Bobby, and Bobby was not enough. Barbara recognized in herself a great gift for motherhood, but motherhood should be the crown of love between lovers, and between husband and wife. It was not fair that her feeling of motherhood should be poured on her pupils and Bobby, that her love should be of the giving kind. She was so full of life, and so full of wants, that she ought to receive. Yet no one considered her a vessel for love. Her romantic pupils repeated the story of her brief marriage and its tragic ending, and would have been deeply regretful if she had disappointed their sentimental expectations by taking another husband. The young men in Charlottesville—for all people there were not middle-aged—looked on her as a perpetual schoolmistress. Her world considered that she had had her romance.

Speculation had been going through Lucia's head, for presently she said:

"By the way, a common friend of ours will be here soon—Dr. Hare. He's coming after his mother. Now that his father is gone, he thinks this is no place for her."

"I wonder how she will bear transplanting, poor woman," Barbara said. "In the last few years I am beginning to understand something of how elderly people feel, and I really think they prefer old friends in a familiar place to their own children in a foreign place."

"Perhaps," Lucia said, indifferently. "My father is

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

the sort of person who isn't in his child's power. His child follows him, and not he his child, and I'm very glad of it, for if it hadn't been for his business interests I'd never have met Stephen."

Always her words came back to Stephen, Barbara thought.

"Leonard Hare was so nice to me just after my—my loss," Barbara said. "For a long time he wrote me every week, but I am afraid my answers were dull, and we both were busy. At any rate the correspondence dwindled. I didn't see him upon the two occasions he was back here, visiting his kin, for one time I had sister Anita in a sanitarium, and the other time I was ill."

"Oh, you'll soon pick up the friendship where you dropped it," Lucia said, comfortably. "He's a splendid surgeon. Maybe he can do something for your sister-in-law."

"I'm afraid not. Sister Anita will never be well again," Barbara returned.

"Stephen says you've been a perfect saint about taking care of her."

"Who speaks of Stephen?" said Thornton, coming out of the doorway from the dark hall and blinking down upon them. "How do you do, Barbara? Time writes no wrinkles on your azure brow."

Barbara gave him her hand, looking at him with a certain grave curiosity. Love had evidently exalted Lucia Streeter, given her a confidingness, a sympathy, an air of emotional safety that she had not had before. What had love done for Stephen? So far as Barbara could see, it had not changed him. There was, she thought, a kind of big, Gothic grace about him. He looked vivid, masterful, interested, and he had always looked that, even when he had been a young school-boy. His eyes, as they rested on Lucia, did not soften particularly, though they had in them the pride of ownership.

"Will you have some tea?" Barbara asked.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"No, thanks; just a chat with you."

He took the chair next Lucia, touching her shoulder lightly as he passed. She looked up at him proudly and her hand stole toward him. The little by-play hurt Barbara; she wanted them to be happy, but she did not want to be reminded of her own loneliness. Stephen began to talk of Anita, and then, much more sympathetically, of Barbara herself, telling her that she ought to have a change, that she had been too tightly tied to Anita's bed and sofa.

"Oh, I'll be here for ever," Barbara said.

"Not you," Stephen returned, with the comfortable optimism of a man happily engaged to a woman of unexacting temperament.

"Not you," echoed Lucia, certain, now that she herself was loved by a man, that it was a thing likely to happen to any girl.

"But I love Grassmere," said Barbara, defensively.

"So do I," Thornton said. "Maybe Lucia and I will rent it of you some day."

Barbara shot him a quick, surprised glance. Lucia began to talk of possible houses, and soon, feeling that she had sufficiently shared Thornton with other people for the present, she rose to go. Barbara watched them as they went down the drive, lingering until a fretful voice called:

"Ain't you coming in?"

She went to the library, where Anita lay, spent from the excitement of Thornton's call.

"Sister Anita," she asked, "doesn't Stephen Thornton know he's to have this place?"

"No, he doesn't," Anita said, "and I'll thank you not to tell him. People may think what they please till I'm dead. Where you going?"

"Up-stairs to take off my habit, and, since I've got a headache, I sha'n't be down till supper is called."

She went up-stairs and sat for a long time in the room

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

which had been the Langworthy nursery, looking out over the grove that gave on the graveyard, where she could see the gray headstones of those near and dear to her. In the grove a myriad of birds were making the sweet poignant love-calls of the spring. In the kitchen garden she saw 'Thias leaving his work to talk with a young sunbonneted negress from the Langrel place. All day long she had seen new life surging up in nature and in the veins of people; she had felt it beating in her own blood. Men and girls were mating, but for her there was no mate. Her heart might call, but there was no voice to respond, and down-stairs, menacing, oppressive, eternal, was the perpetually angry sick woman who symbolized her duty.

VIII

A RESPITE

TWO or three days later Barbara had just assured Bobby that she loved him better than she had yesterday, when she heard the sharp clipping of hoof-beats. She looked up to see Thornton riding by with hard, troubled face. At first he glanced at her as if he did not see her, then he stopped suddenly, and said:

"Barbara, perhaps you can help me. It's about Mary Thornton."

"What is the trouble with Mary?" Barbara asked. "She hasn't been in school for three days. I thought perhaps Mrs. Langrel was ill and Mary had to stay home to take care of her."

"I went up there this morning," he said. "I found Mary in the woods crying. I seemed to guess the sort of thing that was the matter, for I'd seen that young hound of a Shields hanging about her—"

Barbara looked at him with slowly comprehending glance. "You mean—"

"I mean I galloped off, intending to find Shields and horsewhip or kill him. Now I'm wondering what to do."

"Poor little Mary!" Barbara said.

"You don't seem ashamed of her, or disgusted, Barbara?" he said, curiously.

"Ought I to? It wouldn't have occurred to me that anything could have been wrong, but, now that I know it is, their sin of blood seems—well, unfortunate and distressing, but I can't feel that Mary is a pariah."

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"I'm thinking of going straight to the boy's father—"

"Go to the boy himself," Barbara said. "He's twenty-one, legally a man. If he and Mary love each other they ought to marry; not otherwise. But they do love each other."

"They must marry, and at once; it's necessary to save the child from disgrace."

"I'll ride back with you," Barbara said. "I know young Shields very well."

She turned Kirby, and she and Thornton rode back to Charlottesville, talking of red-lipped Mary and of Mrs. Langrel and of other people who had put the cup of life to eager lips and had drunk deep for weal or for woe. They were both keenly interested in the matter in hand, but interpenetrating it was the conviction that they were closer to each other than they had ever been.

"I seem to know you better than I have, Barbara," he said once. "You are made on a bigger plan than I had supposed, and you face facts straightforwardly."

"Oh, just because I've been buried alive, that doesn't mean I haven't thought about things," Barbara replied.

They found young Shields, a sulky, affectionate, frightened boy, who, after his first resentment at their interference, was ready to marry Mary at once. He got the license, and rode with them back to Rosegarland, Mrs. Langrel's home. Then he and Mary took a train to Gordonsville to be married, thus giving the affair the character of an elopement. Barbara and Thornton had for a day or two the exhilaration that comes from having carried through competently any difficult transaction. But after that what interested them was their sense of intimate friendship. Thornton told her of his most personal affairs.

"I'm to live with Cousin Sophia Langrel," he said to her, one day when they were riding back from Charlottesville. "Mary's going has left her very much alone, and, besides, she worries about not paying me any interest on

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

the mortgage. I suppose every one knows Rosegarland is mortgaged to me?"

Barbara nodded.

"So I'm going to live there, and manage the place. I've told her that we can both pay our way if I do that. I can't bear to have her living alone."

Barbara reined in her horse to let pass a carriage in which drove a soldierly-looking white-haired man, elegant and portly of figure, with a fixed, benign face and inscrutable eyes.

"That's old General Bower, isn't it?" she asked, after he had bowed.

"It is," Thornton said, briefly.

"It's just like you, Stephen," she went on, "to be so good to Cousin Sophia. Is she getting to be like sister Anita, afraid of poverty? For she has a lot of money in those bonds you're handling for her, hasn't she?"

Thornton hesitated; then he said: "I'll tell you something. Do you remember how ill she was seven years ago? That was because that old rascalion of a husband of hers broke out of the old man's home where she had him, and gambled away a lot of money that he didn't have, in the house of that hoary old hypocrite whom we passed driving just now."

"General Bower!" cried Barbara.

"The same. At that time he owned as complete a gambling-hell as you'd find anywhere. Old Langrel forged a check with the general's brother's name on it—Robert Bower. To make a long story short, I had to use Cousin Sophia's bonds to buy that check."

"Ah, poor woman!" cried Barbara, with a quick vision of Mrs. Langrel as she had seen her ten years before in her sober drawing-room, her face tragic, immobile, and yet wistful with the desire to save little Barbara Langworthy from a loveless future.

"She lives in her poor memories," Thornton said. "Every night she sits till bedtime with a photograph of

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

William in her old hands. I doubt if any boy who ran away as he did is worth that devotion."

"So much trouble," sighed Barbara.

"All the more reason why you should have less," said Thornton, briskly. "You've been in my mind a great deal these ten years, Barbara. It was really you who humanized me, waked me up to a realization of people—what you said to me once. I've wanted ever since to take poor old Gilbert's place with you, but whenever I came to see you you were so cold, so remote—always insisted on Anita being there—I didn't know how to get at you."

She could not tell him that it was Anita who was unwilling for her to be alone with him.

"But you can see of late," she said, "that I'm as friendly with you as a deadish person can be."

"You're not deadish, as any one who had seen you with that baby boy would know," Thornton said. "You're just numb."

Barbara was glad that he thought she was numb, glad he did not know how utterly she was in revolt.

"My uncle tells me that for six years you haven't been outside the county," Thornton said.

"I can't leave Anita," Barbara said, dully.

"She'd want you to go if she knew it was for your good," Thornton said.

Barbara looked at him fully.

"Perhaps she wouldn't," Thornton said, pitifully. "She's half mad, poor Anita. But you ought to go, whether she wants you to or not."

"That would mean getting a nurse," Barbara said. "Anita thinks she couldn't afford it. There's no use playing with the idea, Stephen."

"It can be done," Thornton insisted. "You don't need a trained nurse; you can get a practical nurse who wouldn't cost more than eight or ten dollars a week."

"It's no use considering it," Barbara said. "Anita wouldn't consent, and I am bound to do just what she

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

wants me to as long as she's alive—and after, too. If she tells me what to do after she's dead, I've got to obey."

"You're morbid, Barbara," Thornton declared.

"Doubtless," she replied.

They rode on in silence for a time. Barbara was keenly aware of Thornton's nearness. She liked the way he sat his horse; she liked his dark, direct eyes, his brown, strong face. If she could have had his intimate friendship throughout the past six years, she thought, she would not now feel her situation to be so unendurable. Of late, when revolt had surged up too overwhelmingly, she had taken refuge in dreams. Now she began to muse on what life would be if she were riding toward Grassmere, not with Thornton, but with some other strong man who loved her, and not to Grassmere as Anita's home, but as her own. She could say sweet, winning words to such a lover, words which would make Grassmere a paradise for him, whence he would never want to go to the crowded life of the cities. Unconsciously she swayed a little toward Thornton and her face was very sweet.

Thornton saw her as the little girl he had so often tossed in his arms.

"By Jove! it's a shame!" he cried. "It's not only what you're losing Barbara; it's what the rest of your world is losing because you're wasted this way. There shall be a way out!"

What, Barbara thought—what if some one who loved her was speaking; some one who loved her so much that he could tear away every obstacle that confronted her, even Anita's revengeful dislike. Ah, then she would not hate the spring. Then the green lattice of the tender young leaves above her head would be a divine roof—the very welkin of the gods! The red road on which she traveled would become the sure route to eternal happiness. Barbara was ripe for love, and she knew it.

"I've got it!" Thornton said. "We'll get Anita to go away."

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

Barbara came, with a start, from her dreams. "Anita has no wish to travel," she protested.

"Don't talk to me, child," said Thornton, gaily; "I'm working it out, like a plot in a novel."

She watched his energetic, dark head, his brown face, noting his intent frown, the high curve of the well-cut nose, the fine precision of the lips. Lucia Streeter must be very proud of him, she thought.

"Plot's done," he said.

"Oh, Stephen, it's no use. Anita's been told before that a change would help her. Three years ago this July—I remember the date, because Leonard Hare came home then, and I missed seeing him—I took her to the sanitarium near Monticello. She stayed just a week."

"Hare!" Thornton said. "I'll use Hare in my plot. Do you think I can persuade Anita to let him see her?"

"Oh yes, if you take her in the right mood," Barbara replied. "She likes to have doctors fussing over her now and then. She enjoys having them find something inexplicable in her case."

"Hare will think Anita needs a change; any doctor would," Thornton said. "If we could get her in some good place, where they understood psycho-therapeutic treatment she might be as well as she was before Gilbert died."

"I don't really think she cares about getting well," Barbara said.

"She'll have to pretend she does. But there'll have to be a strong reason besides her health for her going. Here's where the real nexus of my plot appears. Poor Anita was always—well, a bit parsimonious, and she's grown more so. We'll appeal to her cupidity."

Barbara looked at him expectantly.

"My uncle's wife—I'm not going to call that chit aunt—has a gang of *nouveau riche* relatives who are just honing to better their circle by the introduction of some F. F. V.'s. They don't seem to mind the hot weather, and

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

they want to take a house around here for a while. My uncle's wife couldn't find anything closer than Charlottesville. She'd be overjoyed if she could offer them Grassmere."

Barbara's eyes sparkled.

"You see, don't you?" Thornton went on. "We'll get such a good price for the place that it will be cheaper for Anita to go to a sanitarium than to stay at home."

"I'd like it," Barbara said. "Even a sanitarium would be enlivening for me."

"Don't think that my plot stops there," said Thornton, mysteriously; "and don't ask me what I mean."

"I won't, Stephen," Barbara said; "you're the best of archplotters, and ever and ever so good to me."

Already her spirits were lighter at the mere prospect of change. They rode on slowly, though it was verging toward late afternoon, and Barbara knew that Anita would be fretful over her delay. Once Kirby stumbled and sent a shower of pebbles across the road.

"Pebbles," Thornton said; "that's what you've had to build with, you poor child, and you deserve—stars."

Stars! she could build with stars, if she were able to gather them, Barbara thought. They did not speak again till they reached Grassmere. Then, after a word of farewell, he rode on and she went slowly toward the house, her head bent, wishing she could change pebbles into stars. Half-way up the drive a man stepped from the shrubbery, and she looked down with startled eyes into the face of Leonard Hare.

She had forgotten, in the years that had passed since they had met, how handsome he was. No one she had ever seen had such a magnetic luster of expression. There was a time when she had thought his smile did not strike in heartward, but not now when his hazel eyes were soft with welcome for her, and he waved his hat like a boy.

"Miss Barbara! I got in this afternoon and I couldn't wait to see you!"

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

He had never shown such friendliness; indeed, his manner had an intimacy not really justified by their past relations. Hare felt this, and added:

"It's so good to get back. Somehow I've felt more drawn to this old place than ever, just because I'm going to sever all ties, I reckon, and take mother back West with me. I trust you have been very well?"

Barbara smiled at this hint of his old elaborateness of manner.

"Yes. And you? You look not only well, but prosperous."

Barbara thought that Hare carried about him an atmosphere of serene, unavoidable success. A more severe critic might have felt that his prosperity was a bit too evident in his appearance, that it gave him a touch of the bourgeois.

"This must be the horse you wrote me of so long ago—Kirkby? No, Kirby. Your letters were wonderful. I've kept them all. You didn't answer my last two, you know, and then I was afraid to write again."

Barbara felt remorseful. Perhaps, in spite of the fact that he was a successful surgeon in Pasadena, that he counted socially there, he was still sensitive about the attitude of the people among whom he had grown up.

"Was it my fault that the correspondence lapsed?" she said, leaning down a little from the saddle. "I'm dreadfully sorry, for I certainly did enjoy your letters."

She looked animated and almost pretty as she bent toward him. Color had risen in her cheeks, and light into her eyes. More had been crowded into the last few days than had happened to her for months before, and the excitement of it all set her blood racing.

"I'm so glad you're back," she said. "I wish I could ask you to come up to the house now, but it's the hour when I must be with sister Anita. Will you come soon again?"

"Mighty soon. Perhaps we can ride together. I've

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

rented a horse from Charlottesville. I'm going in to-morrow to get him. Could I, perhaps, call for you?"

"Why don't you meet me on the old Hickory Road and we'll try him out on a gallop?" she suggested. "I'm going to be free early to-morrow. At a little past two I could meet you at the clump of broken pines."

"It's tremendously good of you," he said, but this time the elaborateness of his tone escaped Barbara.

As she nodded good-by to him and cantered up to young 'Thias, waiting big-eyed for her on the steps, she felt that the spring and summer promised her some relief after all. She got down from the saddle so lightly that young 'Thias told her he thought she was done goin' to boun' clear up to de roof. She entered the house with springing step, and then, remembering Anita, she sobered her face and her gait.

Anita received her with accusing eyes, and when Barbara parried these with smiling glance the older woman broke into bitter reproach. Ordinarily Barbara remained silent under such attack, but now she threw back light answers and then gave a sprightly account of her day. At the supper-table she went on with her easy talk, surprised that she could find so much to say, reflecting that if the meeting with two old friends could stir her to such vivacity, what would she not be like if she were only in a group of people with whom she felt she really belonged!

After a time she saw a peculiar intention in Anita's sardonic glance. Her sister-in-law's intuitions were often uncanny. Barbara's speech faltered and she fell silent. Later on, as she sat by Anita's bed, she averted her head under that stare of baleful meaning.

"You ain't quite so lively as you were," Anita said at last.

She enjoyed her power over Barbara; she had taken a hard pleasure in slowly pushing, as if with her hands, all the resiliency from the girl's manner.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"It's getting toward bedtime," Barbara said.

"You'll have right smart to think over when you get to bed, won't you?" Anita said. "I reckon you'll have sweet thoughts all by yourself, won't you?"

"My thoughts are never sweet," said Barbara, with sudden passion. "How could they be? I am made to live in the past! No figure of dust in a tomb is more definitely of the past than I am!"

Anita's hard bright eyes blazed. "Remember that," she said—"remember that the sweet thoughts you steal now won't take you anywhere."

"Don't get yourself excited, sister Anita," Barbara said, quietly. "My thoughts are my own, I believe; but whatever they are, they will never lead me to neglect any need of yours."

"I know what all your twittering means," Anita said. "You've met somebody to-day. Whoever he was, he won't do you any good. You'll never walk out of this house till the day Stephen Thornton takes possession, and you'll bring no stranger in."

"I know precisely what my life is to be, sister Anita," Barbara said; "what you will it to be, and nothing else. Good night!"

Ordinarily the scene with Anita would have depressed Barbara. But when she had gone to her own room she set about her preparations for the night quietly smiling. She told herself that in looking forward to her meeting with Leonard Hare on the morrow she was like some silly school-girl palpitating with the thought of a stolen rendezvous. Yet she made no attempt to abate her anticipation, and when she was in bed she let her thoughts wander back to Thornton and Hare, seeing sometimes Thornton's straight, thick brows and steady eyes, and sometimes Hare's vivid smile. She felt like some one long defrauded of her heritage of youth and coming back tentatively to a little of what was her own.

Her ride with Hare next day was the first of several.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

It was as if she were making his acquaintance all over again; her earlier impressions of him had been too much colored by the Langworthy view that he and his family, being second class, were not to be counted. She must look at him as the Pasadena people had looked at him, without regard to his background. As such she found him keen, brilliant, tactful in a rather obvious way, and amiable. He had a clever trick of description, and before long he was making her see his background and the people who were close to him. Almost she felt as if she knew his friend Mrs. Farley, Helen of the bright-blue eyes and throaty, velvet voice. She got a keen impression of Lucia Streeter's father, so hard and capable, but of Lucia herself he said little. Barbara wondered if he had reservations about her. It might be. Lucia Streeter was capable of patronizing, and there were numb areas in her nature which might thwart a man making spiritual explorations.

"I expect," she said, on the first occasion when they spoke of the Streeters, "that Lucia will make Stephen very happy."

They were riding, and she noticed that he pulled sharply on his horse's bit; she supposed that he thought the animal was going to stumble.

"Lucia and Thornton?" he said, after a moment.

"Didn't you know they were engaged? It's not announced yet, but I supposed, of course, Stephen had told you."

"We don't know each other so very well," he said. "To Thornton I am still 'that Hare chap'—almost poor white trash."

He spoke with a bitterness that surprised Barbara.

"Oh, Leonard," she said, softly, "you mustn't think people have thoughts like that! I reckon they all feel as I do, that you are a famous surgeon and that we're mighty proud of you in Albemarle County."

He smiled at her a little absently, as if his mind were on something else. Then he said with heavy courtesy:

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"I thank you sincerely for your good opinion of me. I am much honored by it." He went on in a considering tone: "You were talking of how Thornton and Miss Streeter would get on. It strikes me they are rather well suited. The only conviction I have about it, I reckon, is that congeniality is more important than the mysterious flame itself."

Barbara would have been quite willing to discuss the subject of love. But Hare began to talk about Thornton's work, and then about his own, and Barbara was willing enough to follow where he led.

The first break in their daily rides occurred when Hare told her that he was to call the next afternoon, professionally, upon Anita. He remarked that his mother was tremendously uplifted; this call to Grassmere was the best proof possible to her that he was doing well in his profession. That evening, when Barbara returned home, she waited in vain for Anita to say something about the call. But Anita observed one of her brooding silences, and then Barbara guessed that her sister-in-law knew that she had been seeing something of Hare, divined that she had been told of his summons to Grassmere.

For two or three days Anita said nothing about Hare's call, though both he and Thornton spoke of it to Barbara. Hare agreed with Thornton that regular treatment in a sanitarium would help Anita, though he did not think she would ever get well. Then one evening, when Barbara had wearily decided that Anita would take no steps to leave Grassmere, Anita said, suddenly:

"When do you aim to get your sewing done?"

"I hadn't thought much about it. After school's out, I reckon," Barbara replied.

"You'll do it before school's out, or you won't do it," Anita said, "because after that you ain't going to be here."

"What do you mean, sister Anita?" asked Barbara, in a startled voice.

For a moment she had a wild hope that her sister-in-

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

law was going to send her away, that she would be free. Anita enjoyed her astonishment.

"I'm going to rent this here place to some kin of Colonel Thornton's wife," she said, "and I'm fixing to go to New York State to a sanitarium your Dr. Hare recommends."

Barbara dropped her eyes. "What do you want me to do?" she asked.

"Do? Come with me, of course. You don't reckon I'm going to a strange place like that alone, do you? There's a cheap place in the village where you can board, and you can come up every day to keep me company and read to me. I've no intention of meeting a heap of strangers. Your Dr. Hare says he can arrange for me to have a little room with a private balcony where I can sit to take the air and not be pestered with other women."

Barbara was careful to make her face and voice inexpressive. "I can be ready any day you choose," she said.

The day came sooner than she expected. The short hours she had been able to spend with Lucia Streeter and Thornton and Hare were curtailed, for there was much to be done before the house could be made ready for its new occupants. Treasures had to be locked away, drawers emptied, trunks packed, and furniture renovated, and Barbara must see to it all. In addition, she had the annual strain of examinations in the academy, and the tiresome reiteration of the Commencement exercises. She was exhausted and worn by the time she had the trunks packed and was ready to begin the journey north. The night before they started Anita said:

"I've asked your Dr. Hare to travel with me. I'm too sick to go that long way with nobody but you."

Since Hare's visits Anita had been taking great pride in her illness. As he would charge her nothing, she felt able to indulge in the luxury of conspicuous invalidism. Barbara was glad that he was coming. Perhaps he would stay in the little New York village for a day or two,

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

until her first sense of strangeness wore off. But all she said was:

"I reckon that 'll make it easier for you, sister Anita."

The railroad journey over, Anita was received in the sanitarium by sympathetic doctors and professionally cheery nurses. It was late afternoon before she was comfortably settled and Barbara was free to seek a boarding-place in the village. Hare walked with her from the sanitarium, and after they had left the grounds he said:

"Look your last. You won't see this place again."

"What do you mean?" asked Barbara, startled.

"Simply that Thornton and I have been working together. The doctors don't want you to see Mrs. Langworthy, and they'll take off your shoulders the burden of explaining why. Before they've done she'll get the impression that the presence of any one from Albemarle County would retard her recovery."

"She'll get the impression that it's I who have kept her sick," thought Barbara. Aloud she said, "But where am I to go?"

"That lies with you; but I've a suggestion to make. In my opinion, there's a piece of luck hanging, heavy, heavy over your head."

She looked at him inquiringly.

"There is a patient here who is going to join her husband at Lake Tahoe. One of the doctors was telling me about it and saying he supposed he'd have to send a nurse with her. I thought to myself, why shouldn't you go? Your fare would be paid out there, and Lake Tahoe's a wonderful place."

"It's all so surprising," Barbara said. "I was so sure I'd have to stay with sister Anita."

"If I had my way," went on Hare, "you'd not stay at Lake Tahoe, for it's too full of people. You would go on by steamer to a little port on the lake; from there you'd take a long drive by stage up and up through the granite mountains, and then you would drive to the little green

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

oasis called Hilton's Camp. I was there once with the Farleys. The air is wonderful beyond belief; it makes one want to climb to the topmost peaks."

"Oh!" cried Barbara in an ecstasy of relief. "Oh, if only I can get away it will not be hard to climb to the very stars."

"Then it's Hilton's Camp?" he asked.

"Yes, oh yes, Hilton's Camp!"

"I wish I could go myself," he said, with regret in his tone. "I'd like to be with you when you're climbing to the stars. But I'm going to take mother back with me to Pasadena and we'll perhaps go to some place by the sea—and the Pacific Ocean, to my mind, is the farthest possible distance from the stars."

"How good you are to me!" cried Barbara, fervently. "How good you and Stephen both have been to me! This summer will give me a new lease of life. It will be the happiest summer I've ever spent."

IX

THE HEIGHTS

THE stage rattled to the top of the last mountain and the driver stopped to rest his horses. Barbara gave a soft sigh, the tremulous, satisfied sigh of one whose soul has touched its highest flight. In the morning she had left Lake Tahoe—Tahoe, as deep blue as the most idealized sky, and hung six thousand feet above the green seas. There had been a dream-like sail across the velvet water, and a long waiting on a little dock, where she looked down on the myriads of fish gleaming golden and terra-cotta in the blue waters. Then the stage had come and she had ridden in it, the sole passenger, through scant woods and brief, bare, rocky reaches, stopping now and then to deliver packages or mail to campers along the route, and climbing, always, until at last she was in sight of Hilton's Camp.

Looking down, she could see a green grove in the heart of a rocky valley. About it wound a river which had come hurtling down two thousand feet, over boulders and fallen trees; sometimes it showed deep, green narrow pools between storming white cascades, and sometimes it was wide and calm as a village pond. In the center of the grove was a long, bare house, and set among the trees, here and there, were tents and tiny wooden cottages.

Beyond the grove and the river towered the mountains, reach upon reach, in bare, gray pomp. Barbara, used to the soft azures and purples and varying green of the Blue Ridge Mountains, had never known there could be

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

heights so impressive as these granite Sierras. The unrelieved gray color came to her first almost as a shock, and then she had felt the majesty of these uncompromising ranges. Instead of softness and depth she saw naked symmetry, rugged, powerful peaks and ridges, giving, despite their verdure, an unclothed aspect, climbing and soaring till they seemed to touch the line of the sky. Far off, twin peaks wore white crowns, and under them lay lavender shadows, darkening into purple and then into black.

"Oh, wait!" Barbara cried as the stage-driver clicked at his horses. He was a light little man with flat, bluish cheeks, and a small, quivering nose crowded in between.

"All right," he said, obligingly; "but if you'd gone over this trail as often as I have you'd prefer supper to scenery."

The horses took the downward-winding half-mile as swiftly as the grinding brakes would permit. Barbara sat watching the gray mountains darken, while lights began to twinkle in the buildings below. The driver and the horses had the sense of coming into the familiar pur-
lieus of home, but Barbara felt that she was entering upon lands of adventure.

They clattered up to the main house, and a knot of guests came to see the mail carried in and to inspect the new arrival. They were mainly Coast people, leaving their low shores for the life-giving mountain air, chiefly family groups. A few isolated men and women there were, and among these one woman at once caught Barbara's attention. Their eyes sent each other a message of congeniality. She was a stout, tall, placid-faced woman of more than middle age, with kindly, shrewd eyes and a ready smile. She came forward to greet Barbara.

"It's Mrs. Rhodes, isn't it?" she asked. "Mrs. Hilton is in the kitchen, so you must let me play hostess. We didn't expect you till to-morrow. I'm Miss Bestor."

They clasped hands and exchanged a few common-

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

place words about Barbara's drive. The other guests were reading their mail; two men were carrying Barbara's trunk and suit-case to her tent. Mrs. Hilton came from the kitchen, a spare, speedy little woman.

"Well, I'm glad to see you," she said. "Supper 'll be ready in a minute. We've all had ours because the stage was late and we didn't expect any passengers. Maybe Miss Bestor will sit with you while you eat."

"Indeed I will!" Miss Bestor said. "But perhaps Mrs. Rhodes would like to see her tent first."

"She don't look as if she needed washing-up," Mrs. Hilton said; "however—"

She led the way to a tent on the very outskirts of the grove. A tall pine sheltered it. The sounds of the river came whispering by and some nesting birds were twittering sharply.

"It's a good way from the other tents and shacks," Mrs. Hilton said, "but you wrote that you wanted to be as comfortable as you could, and this tent's got a bureau besides the wash-stand, and pegs to hang things on, and a little table to write on."

"It's delightful," Barbara said, looking over the primitive accommodations with high approval. "I sha'n't be afraid."

"I don't know what you could be afraid of unless your own nerves. You see where the matches are kept," Mrs. Hilton said, lighting the lamp. "Supper 'll be ready when you are. They've put some hot water here for you this evening, but after this you'll mostly have to get it for yourself if you want it."

Left alone, Barbara smiled quizzically at Mrs. Hilton's informality. It was not the manner she was accustomed to meeting in people who served in household ways for her. She made use of the hot water and went back to the main building. Miss Bestor, who was waiting for her at the door of the office, showed her to the dining-room and sat down opposite her.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"This is supper," Miss Bestor said, "but except for the name you wouldn't know it from dinner. We get almost the same things at noon and at night, but plenty of them. I wish I could make the girls in my school as well pleased with monotony in food as I am. There! haven't I adroitly enough advised you that I am the mistress of a girls' school?"

Miss Bestor was the sort of person whom every one called "Annie Bestor" without any sense of disrespect. She had a glad, full laugh and a cool, resolute look. There was about her an air at once humorous and well-bred, which pleased Barbara, who was not accustomed to anything but seriousness in middle-aged people.

"You've forgotten to tell me where your school is," Barbara said.

"Los Angeles, of course. Don't I bear the Los Angeles mark? But perhaps you know nothing of Californian distinctions?"

"I've never been west of Chicago," Barbara admitted, "and I reckon my speech will tell you where I've spent most of my life."

They got on famously, and after supper they went out into the big yard inclosing the main building. In front of a pile of rocks, so cunningly placed ages before that they could be used for seats, was a huge log, burning brightly.

"We have a fire here every night," Annie Bestor explained, "for it's always chilly in the evenings in the Sierras. Those of us who care to, sit about and talk or sing. It's very easy and democratic, and doubtless not at all what you have been accustomed to."

The log-fire group broke up at about half past eight. Annie Bestor took Barbara to her tent and lighted her lamp.

"As Mrs. Hilton always says about the hot water, 'Another time you'll have to look after it yourself,'" she remarked.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

Barbara went to sleep at once. She woke to find the inside of her tent a pearly white in the sunshine. For a long time she lay and looked at its roof, upon which the pine-leaves were shadowed like great branches of chrysanthemums. From the yard she could hear the call of voices, and from the river-bank the guttural mutter of Indian women washing clothes. She sprang out of bed. She was only going to breakfast in a strange room with a number of strange people, and yet she felt such zest as she had never known before.

She spent much of the morning with Annie Bestor. She would have been glad to join some one of the groups of people following the various trails for a day of climbing, but Annie Bestor negatived the ambition until Barbara should have become rested from her journey. They took, instead, a mile-long stroll beside the river, and this Barbara found sufficiently tiring. When evening came she was glad to sit quietly about the log-fire and listen to the accounts her fellow-guests gave of their day.

During the next few days she became very well acquainted with Annie Bestor. She felt in their association the promise of a friendship. Annie Bestor was a poor climber, but Barbara found that she herself had a gift of holding to a trail and she began to join the parties of the most ambitious climbers. One day, when she had been in the mountains for a week, she went on a short trip which got her home in time for the midday meal. She spent the first part of the afternoon with Annie Bestor. Later on she went for a walk along the coach road. She climbed the half-mile above Hilton's Camp, and stood on the spot where she had got her first real view of the Sierras. Then she followed a trail running aslant from the road.

She had gone but a few rods when she saw a man approaching. At first she looked at him indifferently, and then something familiar about his figure set her pulses fluttering. The man started, stared, and hurried toward her. It was Hare.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"Barbara!" he said. "It almost seems as if you had known I was coming!"

He had never called her Barbara before, nor seemed so glad to see her; and never before had she given him such a glad welcome.

"You!" she cried. "But it is a miracle! I was just thinking of you."

"Why shouldn't you be," he responded, "when I've been thinking of you ever since I left Albemarle County?"

She felt that they had never before spoken so intimately together.

"But how did you get here?" she asked, trying to give the encounter a practical tone.

"There's a trail that slants across from one part of the coach road to another, cutting off about three miles. As I wanted some exercise, I took it," he said.

"Oh, I don't mean that," Barbara returned. "But I thought you were going to take your mother to Pasadena?"

"Mother begged for just one more summer at home," he said, "and I couldn't bear not to give it to her. I went down to Pasadena, intending to work for a while. But my assistant was handling everything perfectly, and it seemed such an extraordinarily healthy season, and so confoundedly dull in Pasadena, that I began to think of my own wants."

"Yes; you haven't had any vacation," she said; "you really got a lot of practice in Albemarle County."

"I've always wanted to be in this place again," he said. "I was here the year after I first came to California with the Farleys and some other people."

"By the way, one of the women I've met here, Miss Bestor, knows Mrs. Farley very well. Mrs. Farley was formerly one of her pupils."

She was about to add the information that Mrs. Farley had had all her plans made to come to Hilton's Camp for the summer and then had suddenly changed them to

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

go to the seashore. She was glad she did not when Hare said:

"I wish you could meet Mrs. Farley. You'd like her. She generally comes to the mountains, but this year her husband insisted on the beach for the children. She's at the place mother and I would have gone to if mother had come West now!"

That friendship with the Farleys must be a strong one, Barbara reflected. She found herself more keenly interested in Hare's relationships than she had known she could be.

"You can't have mentioned me to Miss Bestor," Hare went on, "or she would have told you that I am a friend of hers. She's a good sort, but a miserable climber. We'll often have to leave her behind, Barbara. We're going to have a bully time, aren't we?"

"Oh, we are," she responded, gleefully. "It just needed a real friend to make this place perfect."

Color had risen in her cheeks and her eyes were shining. She looked to Hare much as she had when he had come upon her, after years of absence, in the driveway before Grassmere. Then he had felt a warmth due to long acquaintance and touched with the remembrance that she was one of the Langworthys. Now he added the sense of a host and a protector. He would show her the most magnificent aspect of his California, and since she had come here at his suggestion he would take care that her vacation should be all she could wish.

"I'm going to leave you," Barbara said, frankly. "I didn't come up here to meet you, but if I ride down with you in the coach it will seem as if I did. I'm going to run on ahead and be one of the interested spectators when you arrive."

"Good girl," he commended. "No matter how we act when we meet they won't believe it after three days."

"Au revoir," she called, laughing, and began to run lightly down the long hill.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

When had she felt like running before? she asked herself. Her heart was as light as her feet. Hare was revealing a new side of himself; he had an air of playful *camaraderie* which she liked, and which no one had ever shown her. Already she began to wonder how long he could stay. He was going to be the splendid climax of her holiday, and she wanted the climax to be as long drawn out as possible.

Very often she wore to supper the loose blouse and divided skirt which was the regulation climbing-costume. But on this evening she hurried to her tent and put on the gown that was most becoming. It was black, as were all her clothes; the people at Hilton's Camp, except Miss Bestor, thought she had been rather recently widowed. Barbara surveyed herself in the mirror with a touch of discontent. She decided that in the autumn she would wear a little color; Anita need not see it. She remembered a white fischu which one of her pupils had given her, and she added it to her gown, with the result that she was transformed.

"Honey," she said to herself in the glass, "I reckon there are people homelier than you are in this world."

She called at Annie Bestor's shack that they might go together to await the coming of the coach.

"Why, child," Annie Bestor said, "you don't look a day over twenty-two! Why in the world haven't you been putting on white before?"

"I don't know," Barbara said. "Or of course I do. I couldn't have worn it in Anita's company. One of my pupils gave me this or I'd never have had it."

"Wait!" Annie Bestor said. "One of my pupils gave me something that you suggest a use for. The nice young goose saw me off at the train and pushed it in my hand at parting. Here it is." She clasped a string of blue beads about Barbara's neck. "Good enough," she said; "they repeat the color of your eyes. Now any one who wants to be gay may speak above a whisper in your presence."

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"Dear me!" said Barbara in dismay. "Am I as gloomy a force as all that?"

"Not gloomy so much as frozen. Come along. I hear the rattle of the coach."

"I'm melting every day," Barbara assured her as they crossed the yard.

They stood in front of the office door as the coach jangled and clattered down the last lap of the hill and dashed triumphantly into the yard. It bore several new guests, most of them cramped from the long ride. Hare leaped down last, and was greeted enthusiastically by Mrs. Hilton.

"Why, if it isn't Dr. Hare!" she cried. "I thought I knew your face. Well, well, but I'm glad you've come back! I haven't forgotten the way you took that bone out of baby's throat. Jimmy," she added, warningly, to her husband, a neat, little, sprightly old man who was conducting the registration of the other new guests—"Jimmy, remember the big tent that the Martins have just vacated is for Dr. Hare."

"Yep," returned her husband; and the other new arrivals, understanding perfectly that Hare had made no reservation and was being preferred over them, looked at him with disfavor.

"There's one of my pals," Annie Bestor said, "Dr. Leonard Hare. Now we'll be sure of a squire, and I can tell you one is needed even here."

"I know Dr. Hare," Barbara said. "He comes from Albemarle County, and he's one of the first persons I can remember. But he didn't tell me he was coming here."

Hare joined them, shaking hands first with Annie Bestor and then with Barbara. "How are you, Miss Bestor? How are you, Miss Barbara? I'm a lucky man to have decided all in a minute upon a vacation, and then to have fallen among friends."

Barbara enjoyed their little deception, even though she felt it was silly. Mrs. Hilton, seeing that Hare had found

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

friends, promptly arranged for him to sit at the same table with Barbara and Annie Bestor. Then she pointed out his big tent, which was not far from Barbara's. After supper, when they were sitting in the light of the burning log, Hare murmured to Barbara: "It took my breath, Barbara, when I saw you with that blue chain around your throat. It made me remember you as a little girl when you were always wearing flaming scarlet and sky-blues. It made me realize more than ever how wicked Mrs. Langworthy is."

But Barbara was in no mood for self-pity. "This summer isn't being wasted," she said. "Whether I have to go back to prison or not, I'm free for this summer."

"You're a dead-game sport, Barbara," he said. "I've always thought so."

Barbara smiled as she reflected that the time had been when she would have been very much offended at the idea of "little Leonard Hare" as Gilbert had always called him, dubbing her a "dead-game sport." Now she took the praise with elated satisfaction.

The next day they went on a stiff climb with a number of people who sat at their table. After the first minute or two Hare and Barbara were well in the lead.

"I've got to lead on these trails," Hare told her. "It always humiliates me to be in a party with a man who has as much speed and endurance as I have. I wondered if I'd have to dawdle much for you, Barbara, but I might have known you could keep up with me."

If there was a hint of patronage in his tone, Barbara did not perceive it.

"You are dawdling for me now," she accused him.

"Not very much. You do astonishingly well, considering that you've never climbed before. But Southern girls are always surprising me with their endurance and resourcefulness. Don't you agree with me, Barbara?"

She wondered whether he were repeating her name so often because he liked the sensation of using it without the

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"Miss." She smiled at him in reply and suggested that they wait for the others.

"I reckon we'd better," he said; "they'll be talking soon enough."

She laughed lightly, but the words made her heart beat a little more quickly. Hare's eyes had an increased interest; again and again he praised her for her skill in climbing, yet she could not but think that more lay behind his words than mere admiration for her prowess. Whenever he helped her over a boulder or through an unusually difficult patch of juniper-bushes, his hand took hers eagerly, left it lingeringly.

That night at supper Hare's spirits were high, and Barbara, too, talked more than usual. Their animation inspired the party to linger long about the log-fire. After she had gone to her tent Barbara wrote a letter to a mail-order house, giving an explicit order for a white lace waist. When she had it ready she picked her way over the rocky path leading to the yard. The log-fire had died down, and lights were showing in the windows of the little shacks and through the walls of the other tents. As she was crossing the yard she met Hare. His voice came to her softly through the darkness.

"That you, Barbara? Can I do anything for you?"

"I'm only carrying a letter to the office."

"Give it to me," he said. "Let me take you back to your tent."

He accompanied her as far as the path.

"I can make the rest of the way, Leonard," she said.

"Thank you, and good night."

"Good night, Barbara. I can't tell you how glad I am to be here. Won't you shake hands for good night?"

She gave him her hand and he held it warmly.

"We'll have a good summer. Good night."

"Good night."

When Barbara returned to her tent she unlocked her trunk and took from the bottom of it a leathern jewel-case

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

which had belonged to Rhodes's mother. She opened it and looked at the many jewels. She knew their great value, but she preferred carrying them with her to putting them in a bank. She fingered the large diamond that was set in her engagement ring; she tried on the string of pearls that had been the first necklace Rhodes had given her—given, she knew, because he thought they suited so well her girlish innocence. There were other necklaces—a string of gold and diamonds, a giant silver coil set with a dozen fine emeralds, another of aquamarines and pearls, and a strange, heavy gold circlet set with rubies.

She tried on this last and held the lamp high, looking at herself. She seemed almost transformed.

"I look as if I could—live!" she whispered to herself.

Then abruptly she took off the necklace and put it back with the others. She fingered the rings and bracelets, but she did not put any of them on.

"No, no, I can't wear any of poor Mr. Rhodes's jewelry here," she said.

She did not ask herself why; she did not wish to probe for the reason. She locked up the jewelry, put out the lamp, and went to bed. All her senses were heightened. She could hear the river clearly; her ear even caught its heavy fall over the high rocks, its shivered tinkle among the little stones. She heard the sound of voices at the sulphur-spring—gentle, confidential voices—and wondered whose they were. The house-dog barked once shrilly, and was greeted by a stern masculine voice. A little wind rose in the pine-tree over her tent, and as she listened to its wistful cadence her high spirits died, and she became wistful, too. She thought of her dear Gilbert, and of Rhodes, two who had loved her so well, lying now helpless dust in their graves. And she knew the wonder that comes to every one—a fierce wonder that love and power and joy and sin, once so alive in a man or a woman, can suddenly be stricken into nothingness. She thought of Anita, kept alive by hate, that was, after all, only a

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

hard, perverted love. She felt softly sorry for Anita, not stonily sorry as she had been heretofore. There was no one sad or sinful in the world for whom, at the moment, Barbara did not have pity and toleration.

She slept and had a strange dream. It seemed to her that once more she was riding with Stephen Thornton, but this time not over the long red road that led beyond the Blue Ridge Mountains. Their route lay over the granite coach road. Behind them was Lake Tahoe, and from its shores she had carried a burden which seemed increasingly heavy.

"What have you got in your arms and your lap, Barbara?" she thought Thornton asked her.

"Stars," she said. "I picked them up on the shores of the lake, and I have been gathering them ever since, and they are very heavy."

"Look at them, Barbara," he said. "They are not stars; they are pebbles."

She thought she looked at them and wept.

"You told me that I deserved to gather stars, Stephen," she said. "I thought these were stars, but they are only stones that have bruised my fingers."

"Let them fall," he said.

"But I want them. If I cannot have the stars I must have something."

"Let them go," he said.

She emptied her arms, and then she was alone once more on the red road, traveling to Grassmere, and to Anita, who laughed at her and told her that a murderess had no right to wear Rhodes's jewels.

Barbara awoke, shivering. The night was still; the river whispered softly, and through the open flap of the tent she could see the great midnight stars in the velvet sky.

"Who knows," she whispered—"who knows but that I shall yet reach them—the stars!"

X

THE APPROACH TO THE STARS

BARBARA wondered how those she lived among could take so placidly the golden days that meant so much to her. Some of them seemed scarcely to know that the sun was shining and that the winds sat with folded wings until it had set. They never plunged into the deep green pools of the river, nor fished for trout where the stream was wide. They seemed to be there to let nature come forward and give them salutary treatment, but they did not wake to each morning with joyous heart.

For three or four days Barbara and Hare were alone only for brief moments when they forged ahead of their companions in the climbing or when they met by chance at the medicinal springs in the yard. Barbara liked to stand by Hare at the foot of a tall boulder, waiting for the others to come up, enjoying a thrill of superiority that she and he were such good climbers, and a sense of peculiar intimacy in standing with him there in the open. She knew that they were on the threshold of a new vista; these short snatches of talk were only the beginning.

One day they had led a party over a stiff trail up the highest mountain-peak in the neighborhood of Hilton's Camp. By luncheon-time they had come within five hundred feet of the top. After food the others weakened, and Hare and Barbara were the only two who were eager to finish. They set off together, Barbara a little wearied, Hare as fresh as if he had made no exertion whatever.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

He was soon as far in advance of her as she and he ordinarily were of the other climbers. The going was steep, but not too difficult for Barbara to manage without help, and Hare offered her none.

She toiled after him, breathless, a little wistful. He seemed to have forgotten her in his eagerness to get to the top. She would have been glad of his hand once or twice when she was climbing over heavy earthen slopes where each footfall sank deeply. Yet she told herself that in the mountains men and women are equal companions, and a woman must not be a parasite. She looked back once or twice, and saw, well below, their companions, still sitting about the camp-fire they had built to boil the coffee and fry the bacon. Presently the twisting trail hid them from sight, and Barbara toiled on, breathless, blinded by the sun, envying Hare and the joy he was getting from his efforts. To her the climb had become a hard task. She compared it to her life with Anita.

A few feet below the top of the peak was a slanting stone plateau. Hare reached this, waved his hat to Barbara and to the little black specks about the camp-fire below. Then he plunged back over the trail to help her.

"No," she gasped—"no; I'll do it alone!"

"You can't do it without me. You need me, Barbara," he said, laughingly.

He put his arm in hers and supported her till she had climbed the last few feet to the stone plateau. She sat down wearily, and he fanned her with his hat.

"You're the very gamest girl!" he cried. "I should think those slugs down by the fire would be ashamed of their laziness when they see what your little feet have done."

Barbara's feet were little and pretty, even in climbing-boots. He leaned over and patted her instep.

"Brave little feet!" he said. "They could march anywhere in the world, and be light and lissome at the end."

"I'm not so sure," Barbara said.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"Wait! They've not done much marching in the world yet. The next thing they're going to do is get to the very tip-top of this peak."

"They're not, then," Barbara said.

"But it's only ten feet more, and I'll help you."

"Leonard, I don't quite like to go to the end of things," she said, half seriously. "You go for me."

"Coward?" he laughed.

"Or cautious, as you please," she said. "But I can't follow you there."

He leaped to his feet, and she watched him take the last stretch of the climb. His fine figure showed agile and vigorous as he went up, and she had a queer pride in his beauty and strength, as if she had somehow had something to do with them, and as if he were making the effort for her. Her own veins strengthened as she watched him, and she wished, impersonally, that she could give Anita that vicarious vigor. Then she saw how impossible it would be to convey in words to Anita, or to any one, her vivid impression of the abounding life of Hare's body, his magnetism, the splendid luster of his eyes.

"Here me, Barbara!" he called in the poor-white dialect to which he had been born. He looked down upon her triumphantly. "I can use any speech I choose to you now," he seemed to say. "My own personality has conquered all my handicaps. I'm at the top, Barbara, the equal of any one I have ever known."

"Come down," she said. "You mustn't crow too long. You can't hope to have a spectator gaze for ever at one achievement, particularly when it's that of some one else. Go on to some other triumph."

"Not till I've found a souvenir for you," he said. "Here's the first knot of bluebells, just the color of your eyes, Barbara."

He picked the flowers, scrambled down to her, and pinned them upon her blouse.

"You're thinking," he said, "that I am talking a heap

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES.

about your eyes these days. You see, I never really saw them before."

"We haven't time for you to look at them now," Barbara said in a practical tone. "We must get back to the others."

When they reached the camp-fire they found their companions anxious to start. They set off at a good rate, but by degrees Barbara dropped to the rear. One or two offered to match their progress with hers, but she begged them to go on. The last half-mile of the journey lay along a green road running almost level through a thick stretch of woods. After the others were well out of sight Barbara slackened her pace and let her weariness show in her drooping body. She was half-way through the woods when there came a crackling in the underbrush beside her, and Hare appeared, leaping over a fallen tree, evidently with unimpaired energy.

"I left them all at the sulphur-spring, took a detour, and came back," he said. "I thought of you every minute, Barbara, and felt your weariness in my own bones."

"Then why didn't you return before?" Barbara asked, smiling.

Hare looked almost startled. "Did you want me?" he asked.

"Dear me, no! I didn't dream of your coming back! I knew you wouldn't."

"There's something in me," he said, slowly, "that drives me on to do the thing I promised myself to do, at the rate at which I started. Your father used to say that. If the tutor gave us fifty lines of Cæsar to translate for the next day's lesson, I couldn't do forty. I can increase my pace, but I can't diminish it."

"That's why you've got on in your career, I suppose," she said.

"But you see I've come back now," he said. "I'll saunter at your pace."

He took her hand in his and swung it lightly. They

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

walked so the rest of the way home, not talking, Hare singing, half humorously, an old lullaby. She yielded her hand to his with a sense of ease and reliance. He was a little glad that she had not stood this climb so well as usual, that she needed his indulgence, and she knew and did not resent his attitude. When they reached her tent Hare looked around quickly and, seeing that they were unobserved, he kissed the hand he had been holding.

"Good little hand," he said. "It feels better than it did before I took care of it, doesn't it?"

"We're silly geese," Barbara said. "Think how old we are."

"We need to be geese worse than if we were eighteen and twenty-three," he returned. "And by the way, it's my birthday."

"Why didn't you let me know before?" Barbara said. "Annie Bestor and I would have made you a cake."

"I had my gift," he said, significantly. "Now I'm off to dress for supper."

When Barbara left her tent the mail was being distributed and Annie Bestor and Hare were standing side by side, looking over their letters. Annie Bestor said:

"I see Helen Farley's handwriting on that letter, Dr. Hare. Forgive me; I couldn't help glancing down. Mind you tell me how she is. The witch hasn't written me since I've been here."

Hare nodded, receiving also a package in the same handwriting as the letter. He went at once to his shack to open them. Annie Bestor smiled after him.

"Running off like a squirrel with nuts," she remarked to Barbara. "I was in another mountain resort once with Dr. Hare when Helen Farley wasn't there, and he behaved in exactly the same fashion over her letters. But Helen's a still sort of person, and I suppose he doesn't want to read her letter at the noisy supper-table."

Barbara felt vaguely disquieted. Then she bit her lip impatiently.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"What in the world have I got to do with little Leonard Hare's mail?" she said, her chin held high.

Her own mail contained the usual weekly perfunctory report from the sanitarium, touching Anita's state of health, and a letter from Thornton, the first he had written her. She read this after supper and took a certain amount of pleasure in the fact that she had not quite finished it when Hare came to the table.

Dear Barbara [it ran], need I say how much you are missed? I went with my uncle's wife to call on her kin in Grassmere, and I could hardly treat them decently because they weren't you. But though they are a noisy, full-limbed bunch, they weren't able to crowd you out of the place. It has always seemed to me to belong to no one but you.

I'm working like a nailer, for I've got some important cases in which I am fighting some people connected with the Richmond lot with whom I was supposed to side, but whom I ended by fighting. I wish I didn't see things so hard just one way, for then I'd be able to support Lucia in the soft fashion she's been used to. But she doesn't seem to mind the prospect of bacon and greens.

Cousin Sophia seems to me to be failing right much. Sometimes her hands are too tired even to hold William's photograph. She misses Mary, too. Mary and young Shields have a little house on Park Street and seem mighty happy since his mother has forgiven them. They come out often to visit Cousin Sophia, but I think Mary's desertion somehow reminds Cousin Sophia of William's. She likes to have me look after her, and once or twice she has called me "William."

Tell me about your mountains, and don't forget all those in Albemarle County who are thinking of you.

Affectionately yours,

STEPHEN THORNTON.

How good Stephen Thornton was, she thought; how he had changed since that time, ten years ago, when his concentration was so intense, when he was so determined to shape a bold career that he left his friends in the by-

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

ways and could see nothing but the race-track along which he ran! But in ten years his mind and heart had opened to many things. She wished she could realize exactly what Leonard Hare had been like ten years before.

After supper Barbara, Hare, and Annie Bestor took their usual seats on the stone-heap in the yard. But when the time came for lighting the log Hare excused himself and went to his shack.

"He's gone to write to Helen and to tell her not to come here," Annie Bestor remarked. "My dear, you've no idea what a comfort it is to me to be able to say whatever pops into my mind in the summer-time. One can't ordinarily, when one is head of a girls' school. I had a letter, after all, in this mail, from Helen, and I can see that she wants us to tell her to come."

"Why shouldn't she come?" Barbara asked in an indifferent voice, watching the flames beginning to crackle under the log.

"Her heart's not very good."

Barbara had always been interested in Helen Farley, but never quite so keenly.

"I should think it would be a bit inconvenient to transport her family here—husband, babies, and all," she said, tentatively.

"Bless you, she wants to be told to come alone. She gets rather fed up with her husband and children twelve months out of the year."

Chatter and laughter were going on about them, and Barbara could hear some one remarking that Dr. Hare was probably tired out with his great climb and had gone to bed early.

"Is her husband very charming?" Barbara asked. "I know Leonard Hare likes him."

"A very good sort of man," Annie Bestor said, dryly. "He came of a much better family out here than Helen did; he's inherited position and money and the ability

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

to make more money, and he and Helen haven't got an idea in common."

"Ah," breathed Barbara.

"Now I'm not saying she married him for money," Annie Bestor said. "People can so easily deceive themselves when they are young; I see it all the time among my school-girls. Wealth certainly does give a rosy glow to a suitor's personality, however."

"They've got the children in common," Barbara remarked, remembering curly-haired Bobby and wishing she could hear him say, "Do you love me ath well ath you did yesterday?"

"Yes; they're lovely little people. Helen's got two or three bachelor friends—she likes men better than she does women. She fills her life, but she always gives me a sense of wanting something."

"Who doesn't?" Barbara said.

"Yes, but— Oh, well, I suppose that it's this dangerous age that we hear so much of, coming over Helen. She's forty. I've seen it in spinsters. A woman has made up her mind that marriage is not for her and she goes along steadily for years with it safely put outside her life. Then suddenly she finds herself, for no reason in the world, longing for love as ardently as if she were twenty."

"I can believe that," Barbara said, slowly. "If one has never had love it's natural to want it. But it's safe to assume that the average married woman has had it."

"Everything's relative," Annie Bestor said, with a philosophical air. "What a woman's got she doesn't count; or rather, she values it, but she regards it as her natural-born right, her own. The kind of married woman I've been talking of goes on happily for years with her husband and children, and then suddenly she gets restless. What she really wants is another love affair, but of course she wouldn't admit it. Maybe her husband is going through the same thing at the same time. They go

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

abroad or fill their lives with other things till they tide over the dangerous time. They're lucky if some domestic anxiety comes up that can draw them closer together—such as the serious illness of one of their children."

"What a lot of life you must have seen!" cried Barbara in a startled tone. "You make me feel that I'm only a little country girl, and also you make me feel that nobody's safe."

"Nobody is; but who'd want to be?" asked Annie Bestor, cheerily. "Anybody that makes a dead set for safety is never going to be moved by adventure."

"Wouldn't it be fun," said Barbara, idly, "if, night after night, we could get all the people sitting around this fire to tell us the story of their lives—absolutely truthfully, I mean; all the important things that have happened to them, and the amazing secret thoughts they have had?"

"Mercy! don't wish it on us!" cried Annie Bestor. "If I dared know all that was in people's minds I'd never have the courage to keep a girls' school!"

Barbara was very tired, and she waited with infinite weariness for the group about the fire to break up. She listened to their talk, joined in it occasionally, and caught herself unconsciously watching the light in the window of Hare's shack. Annie Bestor was the first to rise.

"I must go," she said. "I shall write to blue-eyed Helen myself before I sleep."

In her tent Barbara wondered if Helen Farley's eyes were any bluer than her own, feeling a premonition that some day she would be able to make the comparison. When she went to bed she was still thinking of this woman she had never seen. But soon her thoughts wandered; she lived over again, with aching muscles, the weary climb of the day, and then she dropped into dreamless sleep. In the morning she was awakened by Annie Bestor, who stood over her with an admiring look in her keen eyes.

"How sweet you are, asleep!—like a baby; your skin is

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

lovely, and you make even the head of a girls' school want to kiss you."

Barbara stared at her sleepily. Somehow she thought of the day, nearly ten years before, when Anita, letting in a shaft of golden light, awakened her to her wedding-morning.

"I called and called you," Annie Bestor said; "but you were sleeping like a log. Everybody's at breakfast, and they want you not to keep them waiting after they're ready to take the trail."

"I'm not going to climb to-day," yawned Barbara. "I'm too tired. Will you please ask them not to wait?"

When she reached the dining-room the party had already started. Only the children and a few of the more languid women were staying home. Barbara and Annie Bestor swung in hammocks, talking or mending or reading. The older woman had a growing curiosity about Barbara. She knew her external history, but she thought that under the surface there must have been unusual circumstances in her life, else why should she take such naïve zest in this ordinary summer in the Sierras? A child came running up to show Barbara a treasure, and Annie Bestor said, abruptly:

"Do you know that you have distinctly domestic qualities?"

"All Southern women have," Barbara said, lazily. "Even when they've got no homes and have been teaching for years, you give any one of them a bunch of keys and set her in a house, and you'd think she'd been making a home in it for ever."

"You do carry a home atmosphere, somehow, even when you're happy-go-lucky housekeepers. But I was thinking of more than that. I hope you'll marry again, Mrs. Rhodes."

"I can't," Barbara said, crisply. "I promised my sister-in-law that I'd stay with her till she died."

Annie Bestor opened her lips to deliver a pointed mono-

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

logue on the uselessness of such a sacrifice. But a tense expression in Barbara's face restrained her.

"Then you're a foolish woman," she said, briefly. "But I was rather selfishly hoping you'd say, 'No, I sha'n't marry.' Then I should have said, 'Please come and teach in my school.'"

"I wonder how I'd like California for a perpetual home?" mused Barbara.

"Would there be a possible chance of your coming?" said Annie Bestor. "Do you think your sister-in-law would be willing to try it, even for a couple of years, for the sake of her health? I really want you. I'd be glad to drop my present history-teacher, who is an unreliable person always looking for a man. Abstractly, I think every woman ought to marry, but, concretely, it annoys me very much when my teachers put marriage before their work."

"I'm really much complimented that you are serious in wanting me," Barbara said. "But Anita will never leave Grassmere. I dread every day to get a letter from her summoning me back and saying she's going to turn her renters out. I reckon I'll go back to my tent now, Miss Bestor."

Barbara wanted to be alone. Annie Bestor's remark about her marrying had brought back the surging unrest of the spring. Then she had been in revolt against the iron monotony of her days, longing for a lover, sick at the thought of her long future, for ever in prison to Anita. In the mountains she had been content to live one day at a time, with some dim belief that the future would be as golden as the present. But Annie Bestor had faced her with the fact that she was no more free than she had been a month before. She asked herself what safety or assurance the present was giving her. Soon it would be a dream on which she would be looking back with useless regret.

After luncheon she returned to her tent, and she did not emerge from it when the climbers returned. Later,

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

she heard a "Poor Bob White" call outside her tent. For a moment she thought it was the strain of a real bird. Then she remembered that Bob Whites did not live so far north, that the sound was more shrill, less sweet than a Bob White's note, and that Leonard Hare had often delighted her brothers and herself with his skill in mimicking that particular bird.

"Coming!" she called.

She went out, and saw Hare waiting for her at the bottom of the rocky path.

"How could you fail me to-day?" he said, reproachfully. "I sat up last night writing a long and important letter that had to go off as soon as possible, just so that I could have this day with you. You've robbed me of a treasure, Barbara."

Her heart grew unaccountably light; she forgot the long brooding of the afternoon. "Did you really miss me?" she asked, gaily.

"Miss you? My day was spoiled; that's all."

He took her two hands and held them warmly for a moment.

"The coach is driving in. It's time for supper. Come along," Barbara said. "I really was too tired to go, Leonard, but I won't fail you to-morrow."

"You move like a wave of the sea," Hare said as she preceded him. "You've that gently swimming motion—there aren't words to describe it."

"Your compliments are spoiling me," Barbara said, happily.

The night was a little cool, and the company about the log-fire was smaller than usual. When one and another began to withdraw Hare whispered to Barbara:

"I haven't seen you all day. Come for a bit of a walk with me. The stars are as bright as the moon. It's not too dark."

"Oh, but nobody else goes walking at night!"

"They're a sober, tired lot, that's why. Besides, they'll

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

never know you've gone. Go to your tent, and take the path straight behind it. I'll meet you."

"I don't mind," Barbara murmured.

He was waiting for her at the top of the little path, and he caught his arm in hers and felt the thickness of her wrap to see that she was warm enough. Then they went together up the trail. The pebbles slipped from beneath their feet and Barbara looked guiltily behind her.

"Nonsense! nobody 'll hear us," Hare said. "You'll not be so frightened when we've done this a few times."

His manner was more masterful than usual, Barbara thought. She leaned on his arm, as they went along slowly, close together. He talked in a nonchalant fashion of the events of the day, warming to a half-jocular reproach now and then as he pictured to her how differently the hours would have gone had she been present. Barbara felt a trepidation, half fearful, half delightful, as if she were reaching out her hands for something she had no right to take. She did not talk very much, and she listened to Hare's tone, rather than to his words.

When they had climbed perhaps fifty feet they sat on a table rock, looking down on the lights gleaming in the shacks and tents. Hare's hand rested on hers, and he, too, was silent. She was aware of his nearness—aware, too, that things between them had subtly changed. She would have been willing to sit there a long time, but a certain uneasiness grew upon her.

"We must go back," she said.

They made the descent quickly, Barbara moralizing on the fact that descents were always easier than climbs, and never so pleasant. Just as she reached the path leading to the tent her foot stumbled. Hare caught her and steadied her. He walked a pace by her side. Then he drew her to him.

"Barbara, Barbara!" he cried, sharply.

He kissed her again and again, holding her so close that she could feel the leaping of his heart. Her lips were at

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

first passive; then she kissed him ardently, her arms giving out to him. Suddenly, almost roughly, he left her; at one moment she felt his face against hers; the next she heard his retreating footsteps. She went into her tent with glad, shining eyes.

XI

A MIRAGE

THE next morning Barbara woke early. The shadow of the pine branches lay across the tent roof like gray, translucent chrysanthemums. The sunshine showered in upon her, mellowed, glorious. She lay smiling, quiescent, with the serene sense of power of one who has come at last to the gates of her kingdom.

She was longing, and shyly dreading, to meet Hare again. When she went into breakfast he was not there, but Annie Bestor greeted her warmly

"Why, child, you must have had the sleep of the gods! You look radiant. That comes of a long day of rest. I've always said that these climbers who keep at it day after day simply wear themselves out."

"I had a good night," Barbara said, with a secret joyful smile of remembrance.

"Dr. Hare's gone off on a solitary jaunt," Annie Bestor said. "He got up early to follow some faint trail that nobody else ever heard of."

Barbara wondered, but the prospect of not seeing Hare for a few hours did not dim her joy. Perhaps, like herself, he was timid, as well as exultant; perhaps he wanted to savor alone the first hours of the new happiness. At first she thought of dreaming all day in her tent. Then she decided to join a group which was going to take a short morning trip along the course of the river. She went solely so that she would be able to tell Hare about the trip.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

Though she walked with Annie Bestor, helping her over the rougher places, Barbara was in spirit alone with Hare. She spoke to him in her heart about the deep blue of the sky, the living green of the pines and cedars and junipers, the eternal gray of the rock under her feet; and all the colors were fused into a singing harmony by the gold of the sun and the tang of the air. She followed the strong flight of a great bird, hawk or eagle, she did not know which, and as she watched him she felt that mere existence was a wonderful thing. Yet at once she told herself that for her life would sink back into nothingness without Hare; all the beauty about her was without meaning unless it could be the setting for his happiness and hers.

The afternoon began to seem long. When would he come? There was much in the back of her mind that she did not want to think of till he could share the problems with her—the question of what she owed to Anita. After all her long lonely years it would be so sweet, so satisfying, to lean upon him.

In the late afternoon some instinct warned her that he was near. She looked out of her tent and saw him coming down the deep coach road with long, swinging strides, using his stick. How strong and commanding he was! Into her mind sprang some lines she had read in school.

I waited underneath the dawning hills;
Aloft the mountain-lawn was dewy-dark,
And dewy-dark aloft the mountain pine. . . .
Far off the torrent call'd me from the cleft;
Far up the solitary morning smote
The streaks of virgin snow. . . . His sunny hair
Cluster'd about his temples like a god's;
And his cheek brightened as the foam-bow brightens
When the wind blows the foam, and all my heart
Went out to embrace him coming ere he came.

Oh, but Leonard was not like "beautiful Paris, evil-hearted Paris"; he would not leave her for Helen,

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

any Helen; and she thought with pity of Cœnone crying: "Lest their shrill happy laughter come to me walking the cold and starless road of death uncomforted, leaving my ancient love with the Greek woman."

She watched Hare entering the yard with the same untiring stride. He did not glance in the direction of her tent, and for an instant she wondered at that, and then she smiled trustfully. He was too absorbed in hurrying to see her again to think of where she might be at that moment. Soon he would come and she would hear the "Poor Bob White" call summoning her. Then they would meet on the little rocky path. What sort of look would be theirs, with one glowing moment tingling in their memories! A quarter of an hour went by and then a half-hour. The mail-coach rattled in and the supper-bell rang. Hare had had plenty of time to come to her. Barbara, going slowly down the little rocky path, saw him entering the dining-room, a package of letters in his hand.

"Perhaps," she thought, falteringly, "perhaps he would rather have our first meeting before other people."

She entered the dining-room. Hare glanced up from his letters and gave her a smile and a bow, but he did not meet her eyes; his gaze went no higher than the blue beads about her throat. He went on reading his letters, and Barbara managed to say something to her other neighbor. She tried to tell herself that he was momentarily embarrassed, but she knew that it was not the case; he was no unsophisticated boy. During the meal he talked of his climb, addressing her once or twice, always with averted eyes. When supper was over he walked out, as usual, between her and Annie Bestor, and they took their accustomed seats before the burning log. For a time none of the three spoke; then Hare, as if constrained to break the silence, said, in an impersonal voice:

"Did you go climbing to-day with the others, Miss Barbara?"

Miss Barbara! It had been a long time since he had

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

called her that! Surging above Barbara's misery rode a tide of pride. She was a Langworthy and he had been little Leonard Hare. He shouldn't have the power to hurt her.

"Oh yes, Leonard," she said, easily and yet with a faint touch of hauteur, "I climbed safe, sane heights to-day."

Then she began to talk to Annie Bestor, including him casually now and again. It seemed to her that her evening would never end. Her one desire was to shut herself into her tent. Her camp-mates lingered longer than usual, but at last some one rose to go. Barbara got up with a light good night and took her way quickly across the yard.

What could it mean? She had never had any real girlhood, never played with other young men and women, yet she knew the easy rules of courtship that prevailed among many Southerners. They played at love long before they really loved. A girl might be engaged to two or three men at the same time and none of them take the engagements seriously. A man would propose to a girl, not with any intention of being accepted, but merely to offer her a bit of pleasing flattery and an agreeable hour. But all that, Barbara told herself, was when they were in their teens and early twenties; people who were old enough to understand the business of life surely would not waste themselves on philandering! And those kisses they had exchanged—she remembered them now with a shivering, sinking of the heart—those kisses had not been the summer-lightning kisses of boys and girls. She did not realize that, although she had been married, in her personal emotional experience she was still a young girl; she did not have a married woman's mind. This experience with Hare was her initiation into love-making.

She did not sleep well, and she went early to breakfast, hoping to escape Hare. He was at the table, and no one else; she saw by his haggard face that he, too, had slept badly, and she felt sorry for him. She would have re-

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

treated, but he had seen her. He rose to pull out her chair for her and mumbled some greeting. Barbara was determined to handle the situation as a Langworthy should. She asked him where the climbing was to be for the day, looked at him with level gaze, and put a touch of superiority in her voice that he could not fail to recognize.

She knew that he was unhappy, and she was both glad and sorry. When the climbing-party set out, and he went forward as the leader, it seemed to her that he walked with less confidence than usual. The day was a martyrdom for Barbara, and it was followed by another as difficult. She no longer kept up with Hare on the trails. They spoke but rarely, and with increasing diffidence on his part. Barbara's pride enabled her to seem natural enough, but she knew that it would be harder and harder for her to sustain herself in the part she had taken.

On the third evening she felt her endurance snap. It had been a day of fierce physical exertion. At night, about the log-fire, Annie had insisted on her telling some Southern stories to the rest of the company. Unwillingly she had been forced to play the central part. Her camp-mates had been all along interested in her; she foresaw that after this evening, if she stayed, she would be less able than ever to keep to herself; would have to go on seeming sociable and happy, when the one thing she craved was to be let alone. No, she could not endure the situation any longer; she would go away.

She felt a sense of release at having taken the resolution. Simply, she had been dreaming; now she would wake up to her old lot. She could always stand things another minute, another hour, another day. She would pretend that the letter she had that evening received from Anita's sanitarium made it imperative that she should leave. Where she should go did not matter. While she pondered she heard outside her hut the "Poor Bob White" call. She tilted her head high and felt her

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

upper lip curling and her nostrils quivering. There was a silence, and again the call came. She heard Hare's footsteps approaching, and once more the plaintive summons. She sat in cold silence. Then he came to the door of the tent.

"Barbara," he said in a low voice, "won't you come out? Won't you, please? I have something I must say to you."

"It can wait till the morning," Barbara said, and she put her hand against her heart to still the wild throbbing.

"Barbara, please. I'm so wretched. You don't know what I have been going through. I hate myself."

Barbara was angry, mortified, sorry for him, triumphant that he had come to her at last, and curious as to what he wanted to say.

"I'll keep you only a little while, Barbara. All the shacks are dark; everybody's asleep. I can't sleep because—I must see you, Barbara!"

He spoke like a pleading child, she thought, and her lips curved in a little smile, half sorrowful, half contemptuous. But the contempt was as much for herself as for him, because she wanted to go to him.

"Just for a minute," she said. "Please go up the path to that boulder, and I'll join you."

"Won't you let me help you?"

"Oh no, thanks!" said Barbara in a cool, high tone.

She heard him ascending the path, the pebbles slipping under his feet. She threw a scarf about her head, drew on a coat, and followed him slowly. He stood by the boulder, waiting for her, and his eagerness and distress were almost palpable. She reached him, her breath even, her eyes steady. The moon was waxing and she could see his face clearly.

"What is this matter that cannot wait till to-morrow?" she asked.

"Please sit down, Barbara. I can't speak while you stand. It isn't easy to begin."

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

He spread his coat for her, and she sat down with an air of polite attention. Hare sat beside her, his head bent, his face moody.

"Well?" she prompted him.

"I'm not sure how to get at it," he began. "I think I can get at it best by telling you a little about myself. You know what my childhood was, and you know that I have always had a sense of worth, have always been ambitious. In those old days all the boys I knew—your brother, Stephen Thornton, everybody—looked down on me because my people were poor and ignorant. It hurt, for in my heart I felt as if I were as good as they were. I vowed that some day I should make them think of me as their equal—they, and you, Barbara, for you were the only girl of their class that I knew."

Barbara could tell by his voice that it was hard for him to speak. Her stony attitude slightly relaxed.

"I worked too hard," Hare went on, "to have any youth. I kept away from girls, and yet I often dreamed of love. I sometimes wondered if it was waiting for me then; but I did not dare go out to meet it, because I was too poor. I meant to have succeeded before I thought of marriage. This was my attitude while I was still in medical school, and when I was back practising in Albemarle County, and during those first years when I was in California." He paused for a few moments, and then he went on: "I think I wanted love to come to me all the more because I had had only dreams. Five or six years ago, I felt that my position, financially and socially, justified me in thinking about marriage. Over and over again I had seen the thing work—a man had money enough to marry, and then he fell in love. I supposed that the same thing would happen to me. I threw myself open to love. I went out as I never had before. I met the most charming girls and women, but I did not love them."

A little pile of pebbles at Barbara's feet slipped and

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

rattled toward him. He picked them up and smoothed them absently between his hands as he went on.

"I won't say I haven't been attracted now and then by a girl, and I've thought that perhaps I should love her. But after a week or so her charm has faded and I've known that I didn't care at all. I hope I'm not more fatuous than another man, but I've had opportunities given me. There have been some girls that any man ought to have loved, but I couldn't. Up in the mountains in vacations I've been thrown with them, and even then I didn't care."

"Why do you say 'even then'?" asked Barbara, involuntarily, at once regretting her question, for she had determined not to speak until Hare had fully ended.

"I say 'even then,'" Hare replied, "because here in the mountains all my senses are keener, all my feelings are heightened. I am at my highest pitch. I have purposely joined mountain parties in which there were charming, eligible girls, and yet I couldn't fall in love."

Barbara was frowning over his word "eligible." She always resented any obtrusion on his part of worldliness.

"I'm not naturally introspective," Hare said, "but, being a surgeon, I have, more or less, an analytic gift. I know myself pretty thoroughly, Barbara. The fact is that my pulses beat more slowly than those of most men; to love I must have a keener stimulus than others—and I believe I am more of a creature of habit than other men."

Barbara's heart began to beat faster. She felt that now Hare was coming to the point that touched her. He moved nearer her and took her hand; she resisted, but he held it fast.

"Oh, Barbara," he said in a deeply moved tone, "I never have had a summer like this. I never have felt toward any girl as I have felt toward you. There is my old veneration for the Langworthys; there is my protecting tenderness for the little child I used to look on as a princess, far, far above me; there is my friendship for that same child, budded into girlhood; there is my sympathy for

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

that girl, widowed terribly; there is my even deeper sympathy for the woman chained to a living death with Anita Langworthy. And then to have you here with me, a perfect companion, growing before my eyes into beauty and happiness, and knowing that it was partly due to me. Barbara, I cannot tell you how it all made me feel toward you."

Barbara tried to withdraw her hands—she could feel the pulses bounding against his palms—but again he prevented her.

"Barbara, I'm coming to the end of what I am saying to you. I want you to give me credit for being honest, at least. That last day we were together I thought I was beginning to love you. The air was like wine. There were wings on my feet. I liked the people that climbed with us so much. It was wonderful to touch you. I wanted to carry you in my arms, close, close, to that last peak. When I kissed you, Barbara, I felt that love had come at last. I was gloriously happy. I wanted to take you with me then—" His voice, which was thrilling, broke suddenly. He did not speak for a few moments, and then he went on in a monotonous tone: "I could not sleep for an hour or two afterward. I slept, to wake just before dawn. Then I knew that I did not really love you. I went off alone, trying to persuade myself all day that I did. But I could not fight down the truth. I don't love you, though you are dearer to me than any woman in the world. What I feel for you is a mixture of friendship and passion. Almost I love you, but not quite—and I want you. Now, Barbara, if you bid me to, I will leave you, and you need never speak to me again. But if you will listen to me still, there is more I want to say."

Barbara's hands lay lax in his; her pulses died down to a slow dull pace.

"I would not say this to you, Barbara," Hare continued, "if you were not a widow. But long ago as that experience was, and young as you were at the time, it must

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

have given you a knowledge of life, a grasp on realities that an unmarried woman of your age could not have."

Barbara's breath came quickly. She had a sharp, poignant vision of her husband—kind, good Rhodes, with his upper lip tense and his eyes smiling. Ah, there was one who had really loved her!

Hare felt her hands trembling in his own. He looked at her troubled face and withheld the words he would have said to her if she had been any woman but Barbara Langworthy. He would have expressed his theory that a man and woman could spend a summer in a purely pagan relationship and part with no scars, having found something satisfying and beautiful in the relationship, a spur to mental effort, the route to keener living, both of them larger and finer for their temporary union. Yet there was something so virginal, so high in Barbara that he shrank from expressing his full mind. Besides, such a belief was said with arms and eyes and lips—not with cold words in cold blood.

"What I want to say sounds so—raw," he said, lamely. "It seems to me, Barbara—I told you I was such a creature of habit—it seems to me that if we were more than friends—if you gave me your hands, your mouth—surely then this more than friendship I feel for you would change into that permanent feeling of which I know nothing—love. If I did not hope and believe it I should have gone away, for I should have looked back on my kisses as an insult to you. But I was honest then; I thought I loved you, and I am honest now when I want more than ever to love you, when I think I see the way—"

Barbara withdrew her hands.

"Shall I go away?" Hare asked.

"No. I'll go."

She made as if to rise, and he helped her to her feet with hands that trembled.

"Do you mean," Hare said, unsteadily, "that I have

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

insulted you past pardon? Do you want me to leave this place to-morrow?"

"I don't know," Barbara said, slowly. "I don't know whether I want to see you again or not."

"Oh, if I could have loved any woman it would have been you, Barbara," Hare cried. "Whatever you do, don't go away with the feeling that there is something wrong in you because I have said what I have. But, indeed, you may think it an impertinence for me to want to love you. For all your kindness to me, you may still feel that I could never have the right to address you, because I'm only 'that clever little poor-white boy, Hare, who ought to have a chance.'"

He had said the right words to move Barbara.

"Let me think," she said, almost in a whisper. "I want to think. I don't know—anything! I will speak to you—when I can."

She left him and stumbled down the trail toward her tent. All night long she lay staring at the wall. The gray dawn came stealing in against her, and then the full amber light of the day flooded over the high walls of the valley; the full golden glow of the sun limned the chrysanthemum-like shadow on her tent roof. Barbara got up and dressed. It was impossible for her to think amid these granite heights so associated with Hare and with her dawning futile dreams. She would take the morning coach to Lake Tahoe.

She was glad of the rough ride, for her physical sensations took her attention from the dull pain of her spirit. She reached Lake Tahoe at almost three o'clock. The water was at its loveliest, deepest blue, and its surrounding mountains varied from deep purple to faintest gray. White sails floated on the waves, and dark birds soared in the soft air. In this peaceful, perfect place Barbara knew she could surely read her mind and heart.

She was amazed and hurt and humiliated. She had done more or less thinking about the mysterious life-

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

impulse, for she had seen for six years its manifestations among the school-girls whom she taught. She had seen its workings among the mountaineers and the humble white people who lived on the outskirts of Grassmere. The way she had taken little Mary Thornton's straying had shown her that it was her conviction that these impulses were not to be hidden and denied, but to be faced as fairly as other primitive needs, such as food and rest. But it had been one thing to consider all this abstractly, and another to face it when it concerned herself. Hare, in not loving her enough to offer marriage, in proposing an experimental philandering which should give him all the advantages and no possible future risk, had crushingly humiliated her. Yet, she asked herself, was it not her vanity and her esthetic sense that were hurt rather than any moral sensibility? For at least he had been honest. She cared too much about him to reflect that his honesty had been dictated by a selfishness that was something less than subtle, that his proposal had been a shrewd stratagem of the ego.

He was not the only person who believed that most love was a combination of friendship and passion. Stephen Thornton had said something of the sort to her when they had been talking about Mary. The difference between Hare and the ordinary man, she reflected, lay perhaps in Hare's favor. He was not so easily deceived as to what love really was; he knew the truth of his own feelings, and he was an idealist, wanting to realize his dream of a love that was a noble, selfless, absorbing thing. Moreover, if he had not thought she had been fully Rhodes's wife he never would have told her what was on his mind and heart. There, by the blue rich Lake Tahoe, Barbara passed insensibly from being Hare's judge to being his advocate.

One day she went for a walk along the lake. She walked slowly, a slim figure in black on the sloping path, with wistful, colorless face, looking out on the blue waters.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

She sat down at last on a cushion of pine-needles and gazed up at the twisted boughs of an old juniper-tree. Her gaze became fixed and dreamy; she forgot time and place and circumstance; she lived in a subconscious realm. When twilight came she got up and went back in the deepening shadows. She realized that a change of some sort had come over her. Lake Tahoe, like all California, had a paganizing effect. The luxuriant vegetation about her, the fragrant pine-needles, the rich trees, the firm rocks, the peculiar quality of the sunlight, all seemed to assimilate her to the processes of nature.

She faced her problem more concretely now. If she could win Hare's love her gain would be infinite, but if she failed to win it she feared that she would be overwhelmed with despair and self-disgust. The self-disgust would be illogical, since if she won she would not feel it, but, illogical or not, she would have to reckon with it. Hare had all to gain, and nothing to lose. Yet, she considered, he did have something to lose, for if he could not love her he would doubtless never love any one.

There again Barbara's vanity spoke; that thought was the father of the wish that he should love her and her only. She supposed she was being fair to him in speculating upon herself as belonging to him. She failed to see that in allowing herself to consider the matter at all, especially with an indulgence toward Hare's attitude, she was giving him an advantage and subtracting from her own powers of defense. She shivered with joy at the thought of really winning him, really having him her husband. She shrank in fear of the thought of giving herself to him, only to lose him at the end. In all her consideration there was no thought of Anita. In those long hours at Lake Tahoe the world held only herself and him.

On another morning she overslept, and awakened in time to see the steamboat leaving that would take her to Hare. At once she wanted to stop the steamboat, to go

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

to him. Suddenly she was overwhelmed by a wonder that she did not feel the immorality of the step she was contemplating. She held fast to other phases of the world's code of morality: she would not steal; she never spoke evil-gossip; she would not take her happiness at the expense of any one else. Then in a flash she understood herself. She had sternly held herself in thrall to Anita; there lay her answering duty. Yet, outside that duty, she felt that in all that concerned her personality she had a right to make her own laws. The external Barbara might be a slave, but the real Barbara could be her own master above all standards of right and wrong. As she watched the steamboat cutting through the blue deep water, she cried:

"Oh, I'm bound to my wheel! Why not go back to him and let things develop? Have I any other chance of happiness? And if I lose, shall I not at least have my memories?"

Barbara's reflections were not logical. She advanced confusedly and in a circle. At one moment she would talk aloud to herself, putting the whole case in reasonable accents. At the next she would clench her hands and vow to leave Hilton's Camp and never see Hare again. She would remember his moving tone, the clasp of his hands, his cry that he wanted to love her, and she would hold out her arms to him, almost feeling his nearness. Then she would get a vision of herself, forsaken by Hare, going back in shame to Anita. She did not know what she meant to do, but she felt that she wanted to get back to Hare, to meet him squarely on this new and lower level, and to discuss more fully the matter of their relations. There were questions she must ask him. For instance, did he take it for granted that she loved him?

On the fourth day she went back to Hilton's Camp. Throughout the drive she felt that her face and her heart were calm. Yet as soon as the coach rested at the top of the mountain, and she caught the full force of the

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

magnificent beauty, and saw below her the buildings that housed the man she loved, her self-control forsook her and she trembled as if with illness. She clung tight to her seat during the last half-mile down the hill, but when the coach rattled into the yard the Langworthy blood asserted itself and she held her head high.

Her camp-mates greeted her with words and shouts of pleasure, and Annie Bestor kissed her on both cheeks. Among those that she shook hands with was Hare, but she would not meet his eyes. She felt a sense of home-coming, of welcome, and she found herself wanting to tell him about it. Directly after supper she said she was tired, and went to her tent. She sat in the growing light cast by the moon, clasping and unclasping her hands, and murmuring:

"Oh, I don't know what to do!"

At last she rose and gazed at herself in the mirror. Her face gleamed back at her faintly, a white blur, with dark places for eyes and mouth and nostrils.

"I'll leave it to chance!" she told herself. "I'll go now to that boulder—our boulder. If he comes there we'll talk it out. If he doesn't come I'll leave here to-morrow."

Catching up a scarf, but forgetting a wrap, she made her way softly up the steep path behind the tent to the boulder, of which she already thought with fear and fascination. Her feet slipped noiselessly from rock to rock; no one who listened could have heard, she felt sure. She climbed to the boulder and stood against it, breathing quickly. Hare stepped from behind it and caught her in his arms.

"Oh, Barbara!" he cried. "You came! I felt that you would! Oh, Barbara!"

XII

THE STARS

BARBARA held herself stiffly in Hare's embrace. She must not yield merely because his arms were eloquent.

"I beg your pardon," Hare said. "It is just— I'd been dreaming you would come, but not really hoping for it, and then when I saw you—"

"Let us sit down," she said, shivering a little.

"You are cold; you must take my coat. He wrapped it about her, and added: "I'm not cold; but I was cold during those days you were gone. I didn't know that you'd ever come back. I was afraid that you might ask Annie Bestor to pack your things and send them after you. At times I felt I must go to Lake Tahoe and see you, must be sure that I hadn't driven you away from me. I went off alone on the trails when I could, climbing like a demon to get away from my thoughts, from the memory of all I had said, and of so much I had left unsaid." His words came quickly, as if he hoped their very rapidity would make them resistless. "There was one thing more than all else," he went on, "that I couldn't forgive myself for. What I said to you might have seemed to assume that you loved me. I didn't mean that."

"Then what did you suppose?" she asked in an even tone. "For, conventionally, a man can scarcely assume that a woman loves him even when he is making her an honorable proposal."

"We'll never get on if we talk in terms of conventions

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

and honorable proposals," Hare said, a trifle hotly. "I did not ask myself if you cared, or even if I could make you care. I said to myself that here I was who had never had a chance really to love, and here were you with your great experience behind you, your life narrowed, yourself frozen— It seemed a chance for both of us, for me to begin living, for you to relive, perhaps. . . ."

"After I became engaged to Mr. Rhodes," said Barbara, slowly, "you wrote me a very stiff, odd note. I could only assume that you thought I was marrying him for the money he was supposed to have, and that you were disappointed in me."

"How could I assume that?" replied Hare, in genuine surprise. "You, a Langworthy, and an attractive young girl of eighteen. You were sure to be able to choose whomever you wanted. I thought your love for him was the infatuation a very young girl often feels for a middle-aged man. I wrote as I did because I feared your marriage would change the status of our friendship. It may be, Barbara, that unconsciously to myself I was hoping that some day it might be you—"

"All that has nothing to do with—now," Barbara said.

She was relieved that Hare supposed that her first and strongest love had gone to her husband. It helped her pride to know that he did not take it that she was dependent upon him for her possible adventure in loving. Hare followed her mood, saying, humbly:

"I've been thinking, too, Barbara, that this summer hasn't given you a fair chance. Here you are, for a few weeks only, and with just me. I know, if you were to live in any place away from Mrs. Langworthy and from Albemarle County for any reasonable length of time, that you would attract many people, many men, that there would be sure to be some man, perhaps better than I, certainly more fortunate in his temperament, who would love you and perhaps win you."

He had touched Barbara's generosity.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"I am really a little sorry for you, Leonard," she said. "I mean sorry that you can't fall in love."

"You're so good," he replied. "Oh, Barbara, it's been so wonderful to be near you this summer. There's no one in the world like you—so brave, so sweet; and to me you are beautiful. I've never felt in my life before as I have in these mountains. It's been almost magical to wake up every morning and to know that soon I was going to see you, and that then we'd have a long, long day together."

His mood and his words were surely those of a lover. It seemed strange to Barbara that he could be so certain that what he felt for her was not love. She was now not so much humiliated as piqued by his failure to care as she wanted him to, and she was intensely curious.

"Are you angry at me, Barbara?" Hare asked. "Have you forgiven me?"

"As you remarked," Barbara returned, slowly, "we are not school-children. I am not angry now, but I was, am, and always shall be astounded."

If she were not angry, if she were not going away or intending to ask him to go, Hare knew that there was much gained.

"It's the strangest proposal one could dream of," she went on, slowly.

He looked at her half-pityingly. How very young she was, after all, how untutored!

"Not so strange," he said, eagerly; "if it occurred to me to make it and to you to listen, it must have occurred to other men and women."

"And so—so naïve," Barbara went on in a perplexed tone, "to be discussing it in this—this scientific fashion. Such—such arguments—don't they come about differently?"

Ah, perhaps she was not so untutored, after all. Hare spent a moment wondering what sort of man her husband had been. Then he had a quick gleam of speculation as

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

to where this philandering might not lead. But he fled back from that thought.

"Naïve?" he repeated.

The word irritated him. He resented any implication that told against his fund of social sophistication.

"But let us pursue our speculations," Barbara said, calmly. "What have we to gain and what to lose?"

"We've everything to gain," he cried, seizing her hands. "Oh, Barbara, think if we could spend the rest of our lives together, you and I! Think what it would be if we could leave all sorrows and disappointments for ever behind us and have all our days like these days in the mountains—only better!"

Barbara gave a sharp sigh. She wanted happiness ardently; it seemed to her that no one could long for it as she did. Hare felt her hands tremble in his. But she spoke quickly.

"Ah, but tell me what the loss would be."

"The greatest loss would be if we neither of us could learn to care."

"No, I don't think so," said Barbara, crisply. "In that case we should score evenly."

"You mean, then," he said, unwillingly, "that the greatest loss would be if one of us learned to care, and one of us didn't?"

"Yes; we'd have to part in that case, shouldn't we?"

Hare, the surgeon, knew better than Barbara could that the one who cared would wish to cling with nerves and feelings, even though the brain demanded relinquishment, and he knew that the one that did not care would refuse to be bound.

"I'm afraid that we should. Yet if I were the unlucky one who was not loved enough, I should not wish to hold you."

"Put the case this way," Barbara said. "Supposing that I proved in the end to be the indifferent one; you would go back to Pasadena, to full work, to surroundings

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

you like, to many friends. You would soon forget your disappointment under all that dear familiar stimulus. It may be that, having loved once, you could learn to love again. But I—if I loved you, and you left me, to what would I go back? It would be infinitely worse for me than for you, not only because I am a woman, and a woman feels more keenly than a man can, but also because my surroundings have been hard, even hateful to me since Anita came to Grassmere."

"You're not fair," Hare said, gently. "You see, Barbara, I've always been more or less contented. If I loved and lost you, it would be very, very hard, because I've not been used to pain. But you—what have you had but ennui and grief? You would go back to nothing worse than you have had."

Some little nerve of prudence warned Barbara that his reasoning was specious, but she was unable to find the flaw in it; she paused, perplexed; then she hurried on to another difficulty.

"But, oh, Leonard," she cried, with a wistful note in her voice that touched him. "Oh, Leonard, suppose the best came of it all, suppose we loved each other, what of Anita? For I have given my life in pawn to her. I can't leave her; she's got to have my service till her death. I'm in her debt."

"You've paid your debt, whatever it is, over and over by these six years of devotion," Hare said. "If you left her wholly now, and we put a trained nurse in your stead, she'd have no cause of complaint. A great love such as ours would be has its own rights. But, Barbara, dear, dear girl, a big love such as ours would be generous, and adroit, too. If I could experience such love there is nothing in the world I couldn't do. I should be strong enough to sweep Anita off her feet, to take her with us to California."

"She would never leave Grassmere."

Barbara looked at him expectantly. He knew what

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

was in her mind, yet he hesitated, for he said to himself that he was trying to be absolutely honest. But Barbara's hands were in his, he felt her nearness; her face under the moonlight was soft and beautiful. Almost he loved her. And there was his dream of the great, selfless love.

"Barbara," he said, "if Anita would not come to us we should go to her. I should start practice in Charlottesville."

"Leonard," she breathed, "would you do that? Would you do that for me?"

"Oh, Barbara," he said, "oh, my dear, wonderful Barbara, all that would be so little, for you are worth so much."

Almost she felt as if he loved her. She leaned toward him and their lips met. His arms went about her, but she pushed them away.

"Wait a moment, Leonard," she said. "Remember, I've yielded nothing. Remember, I may leave this place to-morrow."

He moved away from her. She pulled nervously at the ends of the scarf which encircled her head. Then she said:

"Now, I'm going to assume for a little while that this—this relation would make me love you, and talk to you from that point of view. Will you answer me truthfully?"

"Certainly, Barbara."

"Then— I must know something about your life, about what I should have to compete with if I tried—to try to teach you to love me. What do you care most for in the world?"

"But you know that, Barbara," he replied; "my work. What man doesn't? Most men put it before all women, but I feel that I shouldn't; that you would come first."

"A man's work and his wife need not necessarily clash," she said; "if the wife is the right sort of woman, he won't have to choose between them."

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"It is like you to say that, Barbara, and you mean it. So many women say that with the intention, conscious or unconscious, of making the work subordinate to themselves."

"Of course I know you put the work first," Barbara went on, a trifle impatiently. "But what else do you want? A big reputation, of course. But do you want to be rich? Do you care about money?"

"Of course a man wants money rewards," Hare said, after a pause. "I hope you don't mean that you think I put money before work, Barbara?"

"I mean nothing," she said. "I'm only asking. Now, humanly speaking, what looms largest in your life? I mean, what friend?"

"You, Barbara, of course," he said. "Dear girl, I've already told you that. You hadn't forgotten, dear?"

Forgotten! she thought bitterly; she remembered only too well all that he had said that had had the slightest inflection of tenderness.

"Yes, but I'm a recent discovery, as it were," she said. "You tell me that you are a creature of habit. What people have been in your life for years? With whom do I, or should I, have to compete?"

He held out his arms to her. "With nobody, Barbara."

"Please don't," she said, withdrawing. "Answer my question."

"The people I have seen most of, and care most for," he said, "are the Streeters and the Farleys. It was the Streeters who started me in Pasadena—or rather Mr. Streeter—and I have a feeling of gratitude to them that I sha'n't ever have to any one else. They have a place apart in my life—just as your father has, who gave me my first education, my real start. But it isn't the Streeters that I have seen most of, because they travel so much. It's the Farleys. I met them the year after I went to Pasadena."

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"Yes, I knew they were close to you," she said. "But which one of them do you care for most?"

"Good gracious, Barbara!" he said, with a short laugh, "how can you measure your regard for a man, his wife, and their children, one against the other? It's a different kind of feeling you have for each."

It pleased Barbara that he had said "his wife" rather than "a woman." Her ear was turned for fine distinctions.

"Possibly it seems an absurd question," Barbara agreed. "But when a woman is asked to enter into an affair which may be to her disadvantage she is justified in knowing her ground thoroughly."

"Assuredly. I can't measure my various degrees of esteem for the Farley family, but I'm with Mrs. Farley oftenest and I like to be with her better than with any of the others. She's good and sweet, and she's been wonderful to me."

"Yes," said Barbara, slowly.

She felt a jealousy of Helen Farley, blue-eyed Helen, as Annie Bestor called her—blue-eyed Helen with the still air and the throaty, low voice.

"But Barbara," Hare said, "I can't tell you how little any of these friends could matter beside the great love, if it came to be ours. As it is you are more dear to me than Helen Farley."

Barbara's jealousy began to fade. "Supposing," she said, "that you had met Mrs. Farley before she was married, could you have loved her?"

"But what a strange question!" he said. "I never thought of her in that light. How could I, when she's married?"

"I understand she's not happily married."

"I don't know who had the right to tell you that," said Hare, stiffly.

"I have the right," Barbara flamed, "to protect myself. I have the right to find out where I stand in relation

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

to every one else in your life, even if I have to force you to a surface disloyalty to some one else."

"Dear," he said, gently, "you have the right to know everything that has the very least bearing on your welfare in this matter. If what you want to know lies between my choice of you and Helen Farley, it is you who are dearer. She could never be anything but my friend, but you—ah, what may you not be! It is only, dear, that these searching questions make me uncomfortable. Not that I don't want to answer them; I want everything to be open between us. But when you are so probing, so analytic, it seems to destroy—" He hesitated, then he went on ardently: "It seems to destroy the idyllic character of our relations. Barbara dearest, cannot this summer be to us a wonderful idyl, something that will make our lives richer, sweeter for ever?"

"An idyl," she said; "if only it could be an idyl for us both? But what if it turned out to be only an episode for one and a tragedy for the other?"

"It is for you to say."

"An idyl," she murmured. "Oh, if it could be, Leonard—I'm afraid."

He stirred impatiently. After all, she was making a great deal of fuss about a little sweethearting—a woman of her age and experience! Almost one would think he was tempting her to a more vital relation. If at that moment Barbara could have read his thoughts she would have unhesitatingly put him out of her life.

"It isn't like a Langworthy to be afraid," he said. "Where is your sporting blood, Barbara?"

He had struck the wrong note. Barbara felt a sense of recoil.

"It's not like a Langworthy to be sued in any such way as this," she said.

"At least, I've been honest; I must repeat that," Hare said. "I have shown you all my mind and heart. I repeat that never in my life have I felt toward any one as I

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

have felt toward you in these mountains. For no one before have I ever felt a sentiment that lasted longer than a fortnight. I repeat that you are dearer to me than any one else, how dear I did not know till these four days when we were parted."

"There was a progress in your feeling, then, during that time?" Barbara asked.

"There was progress, or self-revelation, I don't know which."

Barbara rose. "I must go," she said.

"There's been too much examination between us," Hare said, moodily. "We aren't so close together as we were when you first came to me to-night, Barbara."

"Doubtless," Barbara said, crisply. "I'm not going back to Lake Tahoe, but still I want more time to think."

"You shall have all you like; but, oh, my dearest, try to bring me the idyl! Oh, Barbara, teach me to love you."

He bent and kissed her hands all but reverently. Almost Barbara leaned toward him. Then she said, abruptly:

"Let me go, please. Perhaps to-morrow—perhaps another day—I don't know."

She went alone back to her tent, and tried, during the wakeful night, to estimate what he had said. But coloring all her attempts at judgment was the disintegrating fact that Hare's voice, Hare's words of endearment, had been those of a lover; his manner had been more or less the manner of the only other man who had wanted her—Rhodes, who had so deeply loved her.

When morning came Barbara had been able to decide nothing. She went over a new trail with half the members of the camp, Hare among them, but she scarcely spoke to him. For two days she was with him, sometimes sitting beside him, but never alone; and always remote. She felt as if impassable barriers were built about her. She did not know what she wanted; she only knew that whenever he looked at her, or spoke to her, a stiffness

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

came upon her body and a choking, numbing sensation in her brain.

On the third day she and Hare were among a party following the trail to that topmost peak above Hilton's Camp which she and he alone had scaled. Barbara was at the rear of the slow procession. When they had begun upon the last stretch she saw Hare returning, passing all the others with some word of explanation. When he reached her he said:

"I had to come back. I can't climb that peak without you. I told them I'd dropped my stick and had to get it, for it was my mascot. Barbara, I can't stand this any more. I'm going away to-morrow."

"As you will," she said in a dull voice.

He went on past her and she toiled along upward. She could see that most of the other climbers had turned back to look at Hare. Presently she saw one of them give a sudden gesture and stiffen. She turned. Hare was about to descend a steep, smooth cliff, around which they had all taken a detour, of perhaps two hundred feet. It was a daring attempt, even foolhardy. Instinctively Barbara turned back along the trail.

Hare had lowered himself by his arms, and was feeling with his feet for a sharply jutting point so far below him that only by the nicest sustainment of balance could he reach it and maintain a secure hold. Barbara, running stumblingly toward him, had a premonition of disaster. The well-worn nails in Hare's right boot slipped, refused a hold, and he fell. His leather belt caught on the crag, and he hung suspended.

Barbara reached the cliff and threw herself on her knees above him.

"Hold on, my dearest!" she cried.

She reached her stick toward him, but it was too short. She tore the long handkerchief from about her neck, knotted it tightly, fastened it in the crotch at the end of her stick, and, leaning far over, held it toward him. He

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

missed it, and then caught it. Barbara was pulled forward by the sudden wrench, but not far, for she had intrenched both her feet and her waist behind jutting knobs of granite, immemorially fixed. She held hard to the stick, her teeth clenched, her eyes set. Slowly Hare pulled himself toward the side of the cliff. He felt his belt giving, but he saw an outshoot of rock somewhat to the left of him and perhaps two feet below the spar to which he hung. He passed his arm through the looped handkerchief, and leaped for the rock just as his belt broke. Barbara winced as she felt the pull on her stick. Almost her grasp gave way, but she held on. In a moment the strain relaxed. Hare looked up, flushed, bright-eyed, his head thrust far back.

"Thank you, dearest," he called.

"Will you—will you wait till some of the men can pull you up?" she asked, quaveringly.

"No; I'll climb down the rest of the way. I can do it—now."

She made no answer. Rising, she went wearily up the trail, telling the others, who were waiting, that Hare had missed his footing and had had a narrow escape, but had continued his quest for his stick. In a few minutes he rejoined her, stick in hand.

"You knew I'd come back?" he said.

"I think I did."

"You want me to go away to-morrow?"

"I'll tell you to-night. Please go on ahead."

He bounded forward, his eyes triumphant. Barbara watched him till he was out of sight. Then she turned back and hurried alone down the trail. She walked hard and fast, and when she reached Hilton's Camp she went straight to her tent. She took off her climbing-dress and put on the only white gown she possessed. She wound her light-brown hair in a wreath about her head. Around her neck she put the blue beads which Hare had said were like her eyes. Lastly she drew off the wedding-

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

ring Rhodes had placed upon her hand. Then she sat waiting.

Twilight came and the moon rose. The voices about the log-fire grew fewer; all footsteps ceased. Then she heard softly and insistently the call—"Poor Bob White—Poor Bob White." Even in the whistle she could detect a love note. Slowly she went to the door of her tent. Hare stood beside the pine-tree. He came toward her. When he saw her white gown he stopped. Then he took the last few steps quickly, masterfully, and put his arms about her.

"My beloved," he whispered.

He forgot that she was only his trial sweetheart, and Barbara, sinking toward him, only knew that she loved him, that she must make him love her. The call of the river was loud in her ears. There was a soft rumor of sound from the nesting birds in the pine-tree. The nearest cliffs rose strong and stark in the full moonlight. Hare took her hand in his and led her tenderly up the rocky trail to the vast shelter of the mountains.

XIII

MERIDIAN

BARBARA now took a quaint pleasure in what she called "keeping up appearances." In the morning she liked to come across Hare accidentally, as they were on their way to breakfast. Their eyes would meet, full of joyous significance, then they would draw veils of indifference over those eyes, and enter the dining-room, addressing each other only occasionally. They were careful at first not to go off on any excursion alone; but during their climbing, which, as usual, Hare always led, Barbara often outstripped the others and joined him. Then, while they waited for their slower companions, they would exchange tender speeches. They never found time long enough in which to say all that was in their hearts and minds. They enjoyed the piquancy of making love to each other with words and eyes as they looked down at the irregular line of climbers on the trail below. They enjoyed, too, so engineering the climbing exploits that they should take over again, in precise order, all the trails they had followed in those poor days before they belonged to each other.

"Do you love me ath well ath you did yesterday?" Barbara would ask Hare in imitation of little Bobby.

"Better, sweetheart," he would reply.

Hare had heard all about curly-headed Bobby, and she had realized, as she had told him stories of the baby and heard his stories of the Farley children and others of his little patients, that Hare had a keen love for children, a

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

strong sense of fatherhood. She had marveled that a man who longed to have his own children growing up about him should have been so late in finding love. Her own sense of maternity was even stronger than before, for in her love for him there was now a maternal element.

One day, when the trail had been short and an hour or two remained before supper, he asked her to make a little excursion with him.

"Will it be wise?" she said. "They'll see us going."

"I'm going to take you to a place that is in plain sight of the camp," he said, "and besides, Madam Prudence, we'll not be gone fifteen minutes, unless you make me forget how times goes—as you always do."

He led her up the steep path behind her tent. Soon they were standing some sixty feet above the level of the camp. Annie Bestor waved a distant handkerchief, and Barbara replied.

"Know where we are, Babbie mine?" Hare asked.

"Just now I'm with you, beloved," she said.

"Look at the juniper-tree behind you."

She looked at the glossy, stunted tree attentively. Upon the trunk was a roughly cut outline of some animal.

"What is it?" she asked. "It looks like— Is it a lion, dear?"

"Meant to be," he said.

"You always used to be drawing lions in your school-books and exercises," she said. "I remember when I was a little girl— Oh!" she added, in sudden comprehension.

"Don't look at me like that," he said, "or I shall be tempted to forget that we are in full sight of our dear companions. Yes, Barbara, it was here I first kissed you."

She looked at him with tender eyes and with a quick, sympathetic remembrance of what that night had meant to her in its joy and misconception.

"I don't know whether you understand what that lion symbolizes to me," Hare said. "You see, when I first

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

went to Grassmere to study with your brothers I noted a certain device on the stained-glass windows in the hall, stamped on the back of the leathern chairs, and on the insides of the book-covers. I asked Gilbert what it was, and he replied that it was your crest. So when I went home I asked my father what our crest was, and he replied that poor people did not have any. That depressed me for a while; and then I decided I'd have one of my own, and I chose the lion, because he was the king of beasts. I didn't mean to have any cheap animal like a bear or a unicorn."

Barbara saw something pathetic in this confession.

"It was just like your glorious ambition to choose a lion—the dear brave little boy," she crooned.

"I used to draw that lion when lessons were hard, or when it seemed to me that I never could succeed," Hare went on. "I meant it as a spur to courage. Since my school-days I have still used it now and then—when I have an unusual spirit of ambition, or when I am very much moved, or very triumphant. Some day, if a very sweet and sacred dream comes true—if I win to my own son, I shall give him the device of this lion."

She looked at him with shy and shining eyes. At the moment she felt very close to him, as if they were at one in their highest hope, the dream of repeating the best of themselves in other lives that would build a glorious route of living throughout the ages. But Hare was looking beyond her. The dream, she thought, was one they must not yet speak of together.

"When did you draw this particular lion?" she asked.

He came back to her quickly. "My dearest!" he murmured. "There is not a place where we've been since our idyl began that I have not marked in some fashion. I've gone alone to do it. Perhaps long before you were awake; or maybe before supper, while you were still in your tent; or maybe late, late at night, when I couldn't sleep and got out of my cabined little shack to find the

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

stars large and the moon pale and the day beginning to stir. I've bruised my fingers making cairns for you, Barbara."

She loved the sentiment that had prompted the monuments, and her eyes were eloquent.

"Take care," he said. "If you look at me like that again I'll not be able to help kissing you, and then everybody in the place will know."

"I'm so glad you thought of it, Leonard."

"Dear little love," he murmured.

That was Hare's highest term of endearment; and nothing else he ever said gave Barbara such a happy sense of power over him.

She never wore black now, and she began to bedizen her khaki climbing-clothes with touches of color; about her hat she wound, instead of a sober black scarf, one of scarlet or of blue, the colors in which Hare liked her most. Always she wore blue or coral beads. But she needed no such external decoration, for all the youth she had missed had come back; the little dancing torches were never absent now from her eyes.

"My dear, you look wonderful," Annie Bestor said to her. "The State of California ought to pay you a salary simply to advertise the curative properties of the Sierras. I've never seen a person improve as you have."

"I reckon it's because I've pitched all my depressing past behind me," Barbara said.

It amused her to make such remarks, with a meaning which Annie Bestor would not understand.

"If I could just have a radiant creature like you teaching in my school," Annie Bestor said, "the standard of my girls' work in history would rise. Never mind; I'll be seeing you next summer. Let's all come back here."

"I'd love it," Barbara said.

She and Hare and Annie Bestor were the only ones left of the guests who had begun the season together. The three saw a good deal of one another during the day, and

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

Barbara hoped that she had so contrived matters that in the eyes of their other companions Hare seemed to pay no more attention to her than to her friend. Yet, as Hare knew, she was deceiving herself; it was generally assumed that she and he were either engaged or were on their way to an engagement.

"Where is your wedding-ring?" asked Annie Bestor, suddenly. "I hope you have not lost it?"

"No," Barbara said, "but I was afraid I might lose it in all this rough climbing. It's rather loose."

It was the first overt falsehood she had felt obliged to tell, and she was uncomfortable over its utterance.

"They say it's bad luck to lose them—not that I believe in such stuff, and not that you haven't had about your share of bad luck," Annie Bestor remarked in a speculative tone.

During the first days of their idyl Barbara was troubled by no doubts whatever. When scruples did begin to come they were emotional, and not moral. In the beginning she asked herself no questions. Without analyzing the grounds of her belief, she felt sure that Hare loved her. His face, his voice, his words, all showed it. There was no word said at first of the future, but Barbara was certain that their future would be one. She idealized Hare utterly; he was the most noble, most unselfish, most unworldly of men, so perfect in all that spelled excellence of character. Life was going to make up to her for all her drab days.

There came a little rift in their singing lute one morning. They were drinking at a spring, waiting for the other climbers who toiled far behind them. Barbara mentioned having had a letter from Thornton.

"And, honey, what do you reckon?" she said. "Lucia Streeter has been there all summer in that hot hole, just to be near him. Isn't that devotion?"

"She oughtn't to take risks like that with her health," Hare said, crisply. "However, she's much stronger than

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

she was five years ago. Besides, she's got money. No man would tie himself up for life to a woman who threatened to be sickly unless she had money. Thornton wouldn't, I wager."

"You—I suppose you are talking like a doctor?" said Barbara, slowly.

"I'm talking like a man. A man, doctor, or not, is a fool who marries a woman that hasn't got the best of health. He owes it to himself to protect himself from weak nerves."

Barbara said nothing, but she felt disquieted. As the day went on, and as she brooded over his remarks, her spirits fell. Hare had spoken not like a man capable of great love, but like a worldly man putting himself and his welfare first, and love second. Hare noted her drooping manner, but it was not until late in the afternoon that he was able to speak to her alone.

"What's the matter, Babbie mine?" he asked. "Tired?"

"No," she said.

"Have I done anything?"

"Leonard," she said, "suppose—suppose you felt the great love that we long for, and I became a cripple, would you refuse to take me just because of my disability?"

"How can you ask, my child?"

"But would you?" she persisted. "I'm thinking of what you said this morning and I want the truth."

"When I spoke this morning," Hare said, slowly, "I was thinking of Thornton—of the average man. If I felt this great love, nothing in the world would matter but the object of it—but you, Barbara, for no one but you would ever be the object."

Barbara was only partially comforted. She knew well enough what the cause of her discontent was. Her question had assumed that there was no certainty yet that the great love had come to Hare; and his reply had confirmed the assumption. Perhaps, she thought, it was better to face the fact, if such the fact was; on the other

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

hand, had she not lost something by allowing Hare to put their uncertainty into words?

A night or two later they were together under the stars. The lights in the camp were all quenched; they could see nothing but the dark blur of the trees below. They were too far from the river to hear its voice. They were telling of all that had happened during the day. Barbara had noted that Hare rarely talked to her of any of his personal affairs which had to do directly with his life in Pasadena. For example, he had had, that night, a large pile of mail, but he had not alluded to it. Barbara hoped that she had no more curiosity than the average woman, and no greater desire to be a monopolist, but she could not help wishing that Hare were less reticent.

"Have you heard from Mrs. Farley lately?" she asked, carelessly.

"Yes; I had a letter on Tuesday," he returned.

That had been the day on which Barbara had heard from Thornton. She had spoken of his letter to Hare, and yet Hare had not mentioned hearing from Mrs. Farley. Of course, she told herself, she was more frank than he; but still, it would seem that they might tell each other everything.

"Does she like it in that seashore place?" she asked.

"Fairly well, I believe. Farley chose it, so that on those occasions when he had to get back to Los Angeles on business he needn't be away more than two days. He's a good fellow, but perfectly absurd in his refusal to be separated from his family. Once he promised to camp with a lot of fellows, and three days after he set out he turned back. He couldn't face a separation of three whole weeks."

"Do you think it so absurd?" asked Barbara in a muffled tone.

"Well, don't you? The idea of being so bound in spirit that— Well, it simply doesn't seem manly to me."

"I think it's beautiful," Barbara said. "He loves his

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

wife so much that a holiday without her isn't a holiday. That's the way it ought to be with a great love!"

"Not necessarily," Hare said in a crisp tone. "Every human being, wife or husband, has the right to go off alone at times."

"The right—oh yes!"

"The obligation, if you prefer it. Barbara, child, if all comes out as we hope it will, there will be times when I'll leave you. And think of the joy of the return! It will be like a new honeymoon, to come back to you. We'll need brief separations in order to appreciate our blessings. Wouldn't you be willing for me to go?"

"I'd be willing for you to go, but I'd want you to be unable to leave me," said Barbara, honestly.

"Oh, you naïve child!" Hare laughed.

"Don't you like me the way I am?" she murmured.

"I like your little ways. I like the way you lean to me, close, close, with little murmurs of content. Barbara, I did not know how sweet you were."

She kissed his fingers, one by one. "I could make a poem about each of these," she said. "I could sing a song for every vein you have."

"Who would have dreamed that you were so demonstrative?" he murmured. "You always seemed to me so self-contained. I used to think of you on horseback, your chin well atilt, looking down a bit on the rest of the world. I never guessed—that you had such red blood in your veins. After we were in the mountains here I did imagine so. But I never dreamed that you would be big and brave enough to try to teach me love."

How little he knew, indeed, Barbara thought, that it was perhaps not daring, but cowardice that had brought her to make the trial; the gambler's fear to withdraw from a chance that stands between him and poverty. She looked at him broodingly.

"I see your eyes as stars," Hare said. "Barbara, dear little love, I'd like to climb to the stars and make some

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

of them into a wreath for your hair. I feel as if I could, too. These days with you—this idyl—I feel that I could accomplish anything. What do you want me to do for you, Barbara?"

"Live for me," breathed Barbara.

When she was alone she thought with unwillingness of his contempt for Farley's inability to leave his family. She felt that for herself she could never get a deep enough draught of love, but Hare was not like that. She wondered, with a catch of her heart, whether he really was capable of a deep love, and then she pushed away the thought. She must believe that he was. Failing that, she must believe that he would think he was. Barbara could not face the possibility that Hare might not want to marry her.

Yet from that time on she no longer lived in each moment as it passed, trusting without question to the future. Always, even in Hare's most rapturous moments, she was waiting for some word that would go beyond the present. When he said that she was wonderful, that he had never known there could be such happiness, she kept waiting for him to say, "And it shall go on for ever."

But he never said more than, "I hope life is going to give us what we want."

She was happy in being with him, in feeling that she held him as no one else ever had, in seeing him grudge the days as they passed, but she demanded more happiness than that. She demanded what no man or woman can have so long as there are in the world such factors as death and change; she would have certainty. Were there wiles, she wondered, that would bring him to the knowledge that he wanted her for ever? She blushed at the thought, but she returned to it. Sometimes her sense of waiting was so intense that she was afraid he might feel it.

So day after day went by, until mid-August arrived. Annie Bestor went back to her school, with lamentations

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

that her year began so promptly. One by one the guests of the camp dropped away. Barbara knew that she ought to say something about going, and yet she dreaded to speak. She knew that when it came to a question of leaving she would find out how she stood with Hare, and she was in part afraid of the knowledge, and in part convinced that every day they had together in the mountains spelled so much greater security.

One night she noted a certain preoccupation in Hare. During the first part of the evening he had been spontaneous and demonstrative; they were keeping an anniversary together, for they had come already to the point of having such precious memories. It was rather chilly, and Hare commented on the fact.

"It gets cold here toward the end of vacations," he said.

She wondered if there was intention in the remark, and she had a quick sense that she would lose in his regard if she left it to him to propose their departing.

"I've been meaning to tell you for the last few days," she said, quickly, "that I ought to be going back to Anita."

"But you didn't want to spoil the last days by talking of it?" he asked.

"Haven't you felt that way, too?"

"Yes; a day's warning would be enough," Hare said. "It doesn't take long, so far as time goes, to leave all this behind. It's the wanting to go that is impossible. But we must."

"Yes," assented Barbara. His tone was practical, but she thought that might be so because he was about to make their plans.

"Some days ago," he said, "I had a letter from mother in which she said that Mr. Streeter was coming West and would see her safe to Pasadena, so that I need not go back for her. Of course that meant that I could not go back with you on the same train, as I had planned; but, on the other hand, it gave us a little longer together here."

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"Yes," Barbara said. "When will your mother reach Pasadena?"

He gave the date, and she calculated quickly.

"Then," she said, "if you were to go in two days, you would arrive a day and a half before your mother did. You will need about that much time to prepare your house for her."

"Barbara," he cried, "how can you expect me to leave you before I must?"

Her lips curved in a sad smile. So easily he need never leave her. "I was simply trying to be sensible," she said.

"Well, I'm not going to be sensible till I have to," he replied.

She waited, but he said nothing more, and she rose. "I'm cold. I must go back to my tent," she said.

During those last three days they climbed the trails alone, visiting the places that were most dear to them. The three nights seemed to Barbara to go by on wings; almost she felt as if she were trying to hold them back with her hands. And yet she longed for the last night to come, for she knew that then he would speak. It was a night mellowed by a dying moon. For a time they said nothing. Barbara, looking at Hare, had a sudden vision of what he must have been like as a child. She saw his chubby little boy's figure, the vivid face, the alert hazel eyes. She had a keener sense than ever that motherhood would mean so much more to her than she could have dreamed possible before these weeks with Hare in the mountains. Mother-love, she thought, must rear itself to its own lofty heights precisely because it is built on wife-love.

Hare made as if to draw her to him, but she moved away.

"I wonder," she said in a strained voice, "whether we hadn't better be like this, a respectable distance apart, and call each other 'Miss Barbara' and 'Dr. Hare.' For if we don't, we'll keep feeling that it's the last night."

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"That will make it the more poignant, but it will make it sweeter, too," he said.

Barbara did not know whether she liked him thus to savor his emotions. Her strained nerves, she decided, were making her over-critical.

"Ah, but let us be sensible first," she said; "and, after all, I suppose there will be a day or two when I'm in Los Angeles."

When she had gone West, Barbara had bought a tourist ticket which allowed of her stopping at various cities in California and returning to Anita by way of Canada.

"Oh, but it won't be like this," he said.

"Why not, if we're together?"

"Because no days can ever be like this—no matter what happens to us in the future."

So, Barbara thought, the great love had not come to him. She was silent, determined that he should speak.

"Barbara, it's been wonderful," he said, "but it hasn't brought either of us what we hoped for yet, has it?"

"So you've been analyzing," she said. "Tell me then, Leonard, what this summer has done for you?"

"This summer—ah, Barbara, the idyl! It has made me care more for you than ever; want less to let you go. It has made me absolutely certain that if the great love does not come to me for you it will never come to me for any woman."

She waited silently.

"I am more nearly sure than I have ever been," he said. "I've got the sweet habit of you. But I want a last test—the test of absence. Perhaps you want nothing more of me, but I am going to assume that you are as anxious as I am really to love. Will you let me see what life in Pasadena is without you? And then will you let me come to you at Christmas?"

Still Barbara made no answer.

"Oh, my dear little love," Hare said, with emotion, "I feel like a cad talking to you this way! I ought to be

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

kneeling at your feet. I'm not nearly good enough for you. But I have to be honest."

An appeal to her sympathy never failed to move Barbara. Yet she was humiliated. She felt that he must know that she loved him. She had been hoping against hope that he loved her, that he was waiting for the last night to tell her so.

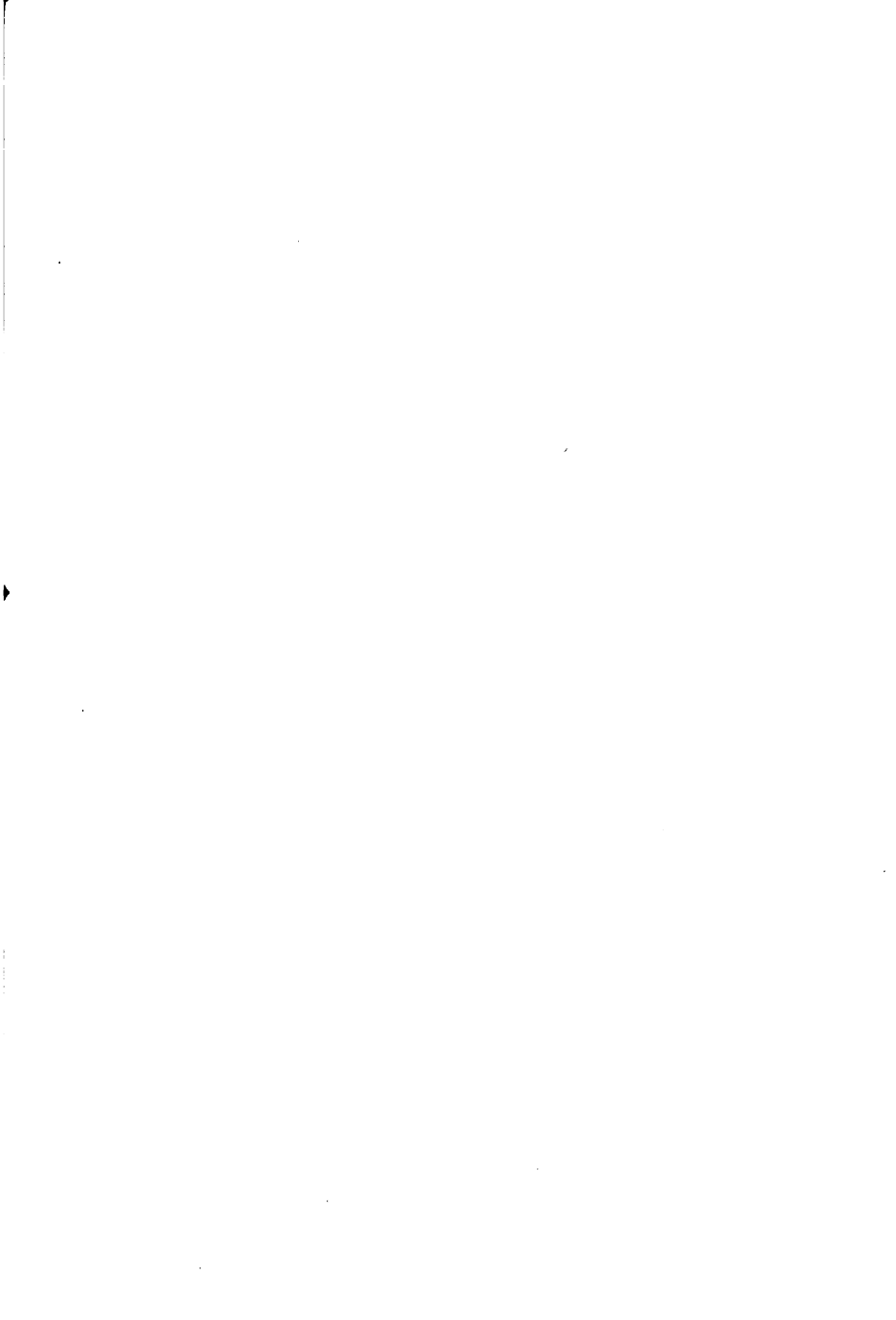
"It's been five weeks. I don't see what more I can do for you, Leonard," she said.

"Oh, Barbara, don't withdraw from me! Don't let it be finished now. Give me some hope for our future," he pleaded. "I am trusting the future. Will not you?"

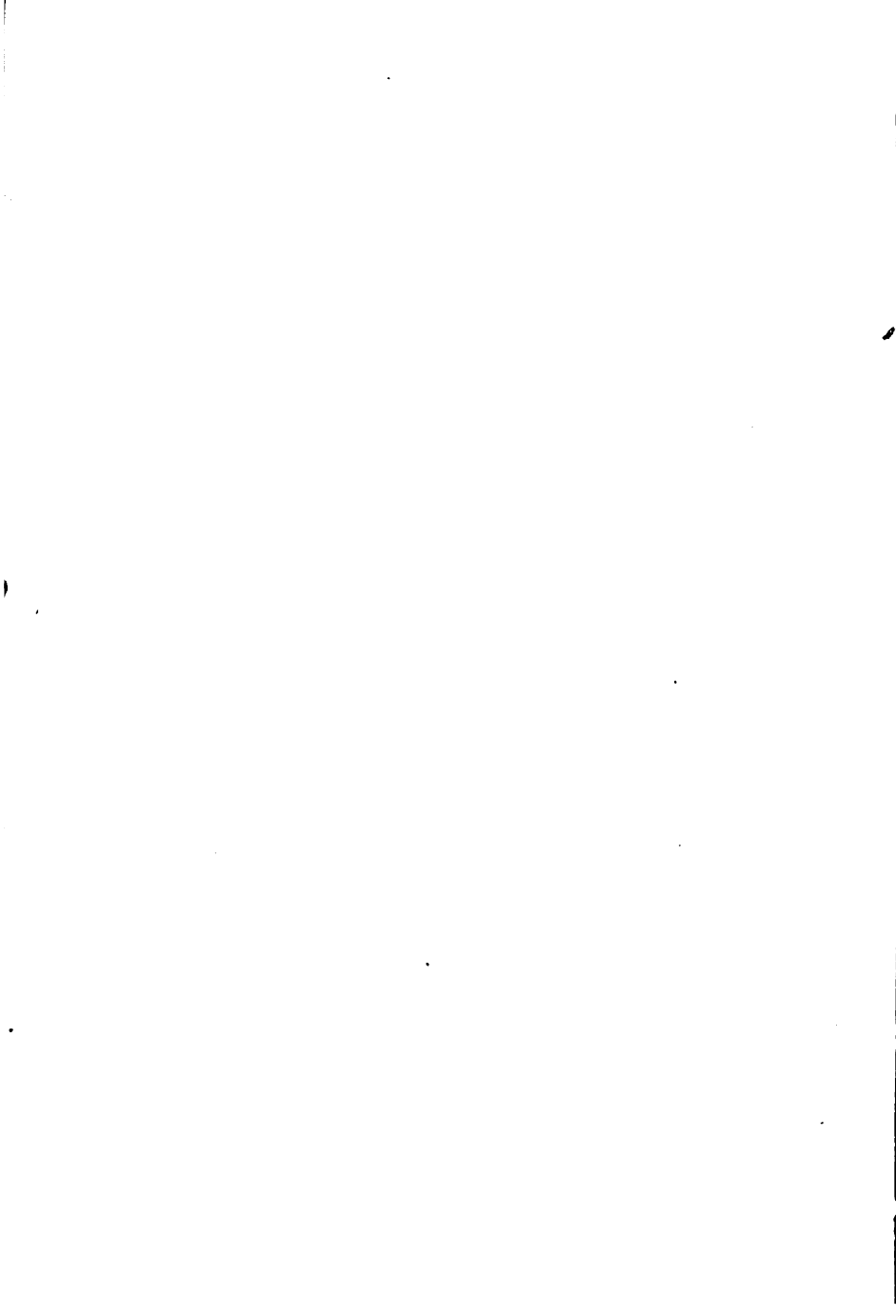
It was easy for him to trust the future, she thought, for he had little to lose, whether his idyl were lost or whether it went on and built itself about her for all time. Yet, after all, when he pleaded for himself, he pleaded for her, too.

"Dear little one, dear little love," Hare whispered. "Come to me. Every day has been a gain to us both. Help me! Give me your hands, your lips. Give me faith to believe that all our hours will be like this hour when in the whole world there is only you!"

With a long sigh Barbara came to him and laid her head on his breast, not joyfully, as heretofore, but wistfully.



Part III
FALSE DAWN



XIV

THE LETTER

THE coach stopped to allow of a last look at Hilton's Camp. Barbara gazed on the gray mountains, chill under the sunlight, at the far-away twin peaks roofed with snow, at the nearer hollows black with deep-rooted trees, and she had a poignant premonition that she would never see them again. Hare, sitting beside her, moved, too, at the parting, read her thoughts and whispered:

"If not these mountains, then others."

They talked little during the long coach-ride. At the end of it they stood on the dock, waiting for the steamer, looking down on the fish shining red and gold under the blue waters. The steamer made the end of the lake, touching at various little ports, slowly carrying them back to civilization. Here were the newest clothes and the latest books; the granite mountains had given way to conventional green-clothed hills above the boat-ridden waters. She looked with sudden panic at Hare; surely he was the same. He smiled at her tenderly.

"I've seen one or two middle-aged married couples come on the boat, still mighty fond of each other," he said. "I like it; don't you, dear?"

Barbara took that to mean that he hoped his life and hers would some day show such dear unity. She was always looking for an emotional reading in his words, always happy when she found it unmistakably. The steamer did not dock till mid-afternoon. They had an early dinner and then they sat by the shores of the lake,

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

dark and dim now, until it was time to take the little Lake Tahoe train which would carry them to the main railroad.

Boarding the train with them was a newly married couple who were being speeded by a group of jocular friends. The usual rice and shoes were thrown; the usual labels and white ribbon decorated the baggage. But Barbara was not watching the accessories; she was watching the shy, happy face of the bride, and the confident air of the young husband by whose arm she steadied herself as the train began to move. How sure they were of love and happiness!

"Barbara," Hare said, "did you wish that it was you and I going off on our wedding journey?"

"Yes," she said.

"So did I, dear. I was thinking early this morning where we'd go. Not back to Hilton's, but to a place where we can be still more alone. We'll take a pack-pony, make our own camp, do our own cooking. Perhaps—who knows?—next summer."

Barbara's hand found his, and they sat in tender, regretful silence till they reached the main line. Some little time remained before their train would start, and Hare took her for a walk beside a turbulent little river which gathered itself up for a pouring fall upon a carpet of jagged stones. The foam rose high, the voice of the water was loud, and great white clouds were tearing rapidly across the sky. Yet amid this unrest of nature Barbara was at peace.

"Barbara," Hare said, "we've got everything but certainty, and surely time will bring us that."

The next morning, when Barbara rose, Hare had already breakfasted. He gave her a confident, loving glance from his seat across the aisle, and she went to the dining-car with a light heart. When she returned she found him looking out of the window, eagerly recognizing familiar landmarks. He pointed them out to her, but rather as if

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

he were talking to himself. She observed, with a sharp pang, that he was preoccupied with sensations of home-coming. He had had a good vacation, and now he was feeling that it was good to get back to his work and his friends.

Barbara tried to enter into his mood, but she had much ado to conceal her disappointment. Hare had so many things to care about, and she had only him. He did not show his usual acuteness in seeing that something was wrong. That, she told herself, was because the effect of her was already slightly blurred by the pressing forward of all his other interests. He remarked presently that she seemed a little tired, but that she must expect that, since one always had to count on nervous readjustment after leaving the high Sierras.

When they reached Los Angeles he took her to her hotel, and then, since he had a few hours free before his mother would arrive, he suggested that he show her Pasadena; there would be time for a drive. Barbara said, impulsively, that she wanted to drive past his house, so that, after she had got back to Virginia, she might picture him going in and coming out, and that she wanted to be taken into his office.

"Silly little one," Hare said, indulgently.

Barbara liked the wide streets and magnificent trees and flowers of Pasadena. Hare showed her his long, low, white house, with its wide piazzas and gay window-boxes and the splendid blue-flowering shrubs bordering the walls. Barbara hoped he would say something that would relate her to it, but he only seemed pleased that she admired it, and remarked that he hoped his mother would like living in it.

His office was on the main business street. Barbara noted that he kept the car waiting; that meant that she must not stay very long. When Hare unlocked the door and led her into the reception-room, she meant to walk over to the window and make some impersonal comment.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

But in spite of herself she turned to him with a wistful smile. He took her in his arms.

"I've never been parted from you for so long before, have I?" he whispered.

Barbara clung to him. "It all seems so different," she murmured.

"It isn't a bit. Come into my holy of holies."

He showed her his commonplace rooms. She kissed the back of the chair he sat in, and the desk at which he wrote.

"Your pretty ways," Hare said.

A framed photograph hung above his desk, of a woman with pleading eyes and prettily arranged hair. Barbara felt sure that it was Helen Farley, but she asked no questions. She examined one thing after another in a charming, housekeeper way, and Hare watched her, forgetful of time and of place. They were once more in the high Sierras.

The telephone broke in upon their tender mood. Hare's face changed as he took down the receiver. Barbara heard his side of the ensuing conversation.

"Yes; I'm so glad to hear your voice. All well?"

"Yes, it was on time, but there was something I had to do in Los Angeles. I've not been home yet, and have been in the office just a few minutes."

"No, I'm not alone, and I've got to meet mother's train pretty soon. I'll call you up later."

"It depends on what time mother goes to bed. If it's not too late, of course I'll come."

"Good-by."

Hare hung up the receiver and explained, quite unnecessarily: "That's Mrs. Farley. She got home two or three days ago."

"Do you call her by her Christian name?" asked Barbara, impulsively.

Hare barely hesitated. "I do when we're alone," he said.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

Barbara wished that she could say to him: "She's not half so nice as I am, is she? You don't love her nearly so well, do you?"

She might have said it in the mountains, but here she was afraid to. The unusualness of their relations seemed here a more delicate thing than it had been in the Sierras.

"I'm afraid we must be off," Hare said. "It's almost time for mother's train."

"I ought to have been the one to say that," Barbara replied, "but I've really no notion of what the time is."

When he left her at her hotel he told her how sorry he was that she must dine alone and that he could not see her till the next evening. She replied, cheerfully, that she would drive about Los Angeles in the morning, and rest in the afternoon, and that the time would go quickly enough. All evening long she fought against her increasing depression, but it would not down. She felt sure that Hare would never really love her and that she would for ever go on loving him.

The next morning she set out in a listless way to see Los Angeles. She rode on street-cars past shops and bungalows, mansions and parks. She walked up steep hills and looked, unseeing, at entrancing views from their crests. She was unconscious of the peculiar luring quality of the Los Angeles air. She did not notice the alert and yet unhurried manner of the people in the streets. All Barbara was doing was killing the time until she should see Hare again.

After luncheon she remembered Annie Bestor and telephoned to her house. She was told that Miss Bestor was engaged, but she left a message. Toward the end of the afternoon word was brought her that Miss Bestor was calling upon her. She went down into the reception-room with a feeling of pleasure. Slight as the tie between her and Annie Bestor was, at least it would hold.

"Bless your heart!" cried Annie Bestor. "Except for your clothes I'd think we had parted not five minutes ago,"

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

Some one else was standing beside Annie Bestor, and before she really looked at her Barbara knew it was Helen Farley. Her eyes were bluer than Barbara's, her brown hair more beautiful, and she was fashionably dressed. But her face was worn, as if with ill health or grief.

"I am Mrs. Farley," she said, "and I am so very glad to meet you. I have heard a very great deal of you, and I was overjoyed when Miss Bestor told me you were here. I begged to be taken to call."

So Hare had not asked Helen Farley to make the call.

"Thank you," Barbara responded. "I have heard of you, too. Indeed, it was through you that I went to the University of Chicago."

"Do tell me," Helen Farley said.

"But you're standing," Barbara protested.

They sat down, and she rang for tea. Then she said that long since, when she had decided to go to college and had been too ill to make an intelligent choice herself, she had remembered a letter of Hare's in which he had spoken of Mrs. Farley as a recent graduate of the University of Chicago.

"That ought to make us friends, surely," Helen said. "I am wondering if you won't come and stay a few days with me before you go home."

The invitation did not surprise Barbara, who had already seen evidences of the generous hospitality of California.

"You're very good," she said, "but I'm leaving tomorrow."

"You'll come back again," Annie Bestor prophesied. "People always do to California."

"Dr. Hare tells me that this is your first visit," Helen said.

So he had called on her the night before, Barbara thought. She wondered if Hare had mentioned to his friend that she was in Los Angeles. Barbara would not admit that she was jealous of Helen Farley, but she con-

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

fessed to an intense curiosity about her. It was clear that curiosity was given back in equal degree.

Annie Bestor did most of the talking; the other two warily estimated each other. One had meant so much in Hare's past and the other might mean so much in his future. Barbara wished that she had had the courage in one of the hours when Hare was most wholly hers to ask him how often he saw Helen Farley. Long ago she had thought that Hare's letters made Helen a vivid person; but now that old impression had vanished. This woman was inscrutable. Doubtless, she too seemed inscrutable. Here they sat, talking amiable nothings, determined not to reveal themselves, and equally determined to read each other. The very intensity of Helen Farley's interest in her alarmed Barbara, because it was so significant.

Annie Bestor rose at last, declaring that the hour had been far too short. It had seemed much too long to Barbara. She was both attracted and repelled by Helen. She felt that she might come to like her very much, but she knew that her liking would have been greater if Helen had not been Hare's friend.

Her callers had not been gone very long when he came. There were other people in the reception-room and they could only shake hands. Hare's lustrous, kindling expression seemed a little dimmed, and his manner was subdued.

"I'm going to be dull to-night," he warned her. "I've had a beastly headache all day, due to having forgotten to be careful what I ate. I always should be after coming from the high lands to low."

"Poor Leonard," she said. "I'm not going to say 'Physician, cure thyself.' Tell me, did your mother arrive safe?"

"Yes, and not very tired. I had her go to bed pretty early, though. This morning she took hold of the house as if she had always been its mistress. Tell me what you've done all day."

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"The nicest thing I've done is to receive two callers—one of them Mrs. Farley."

"Did she call on you?" he said in a pleased tone. "Isn't that just like her! She takes no end of trouble for people."

"I remember you told me once that she was good," Barbara replied. "I think she's very pretty."

"It's her goodness I think of most," he said, and Barbara felt relieved. "I went up there last night, thinking I'd find her all worn out after moving in from the beach, but she's all right. I didn't have to leave any physic for anybody."

Barbara thought that if he had got his mother to bed early he might have come back to see her. Then she caught herself up sharply. There was no use in being exacting; love was never won by demands. She did her best to be light-hearted and to lure back the mood of the mountains, but she was conscious of failure. Hare rose to go early, with apologies for his stupidity.

"Don't try to come back to-morrow," Barbara said. "You don't feel well, and you'll doubtless have a good deal of work to do. I can get on the train alone."

"As if I'd let you!" he cried. "No; I'll get over here as soon as I can in the morning and we'll go off and spend the day alone. It will be one more day together, dear."

Barbara awoke the next morning with a leaden sort of expectancy. When Hare met her, whatever little hope she had had of a good day faded, for she saw from his expression that he was still far from well. They rode on a street-car through miles of suburb, and came at last to a lovely series of hills and valleys, deep-green and blue, under a mellow sun. They lunched in a rose-covered inn, and then they walked away from houses and people into a sheltered, sunny glade, more melodious than the mountains had been, and much softer. Barbara sat on a log, and Hare threw himself at her feet and put his head upon her knees. She smoothed his forehead lingeringly and

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

silently. Soon she knew that by degrees he was becoming hers again.

"I'm sorry I feel so done up," he said, "because it makes the last hours soberer. But, sick or well, I'm so glad to be alone with you again, Babbie."

"Do you love me ath well ath you did yesterday?" she whispered.

"Better," he said, smiling. Then he added: "Truly, better, for yesterday was too full of things. It's hard to get back to work after all our idle, beautiful days."

"They were made to give you zest for work—as maybe I am," she said.

The afternoon was sweet to them both. To Barbara it was like a benediction and a promise. They conned over the book of their precious days, interlining and commenting for each other. They spoke of the good days that might yet be theirs, and Barbara said that nothing could be rarer than their quiet, peaceful present, that she did not demand raptures, if only they could be together.

"I don't like writing letters," Hare sighed.

"I once knew a couple," Barbara said, "who had to be parted, and they didn't write at all. They thought that mere written words were simply too inexpressive—"

"No, thanks," Hare said, decidedly. "I'm not so heroic as all that. I can't imagine not getting your dear letters. I'll write to you every Sunday, and you must answer the minute you get it."

Once a week! Barbara had heard of lovers and husbands and wives who wrote every day. Then she remembered her determination not to be exacting.

"You'll tell me every little thing," she said—"if you're cold or warm, sad or gay, but, oh, my dear, I think I should feel it if you were cold and sad."

"Much more sensible to feel it if I were warm and gay," he said, rather dryly.

"And you've got to write first," she told him.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"I will. I'll write to the sanitarium, so that I'll be there waiting for you when you come, dear."

"Well, you'll have to write at once; I'm thinking of going straight through without bothering to stop off at all these various cities. Anita is impatient and I'm tired."

"In that case I'll send the first letter to Grassmere, for I can't write for a few days—not till I get adjusted to things here."

Barbara understood that he was not sure how much he was going to miss her, could not gauge his feelings toward her till a few days had passed.

"But of course your travel homeward doesn't depend on my letter," went on Hare; "it depends on whether you can get anything out of the sight-seeing. I'll confess I was looking forward to your descriptions."

"I suppose I ought to take advantage of my ticket," Barbara said. "I really was considering Anita more than anything else."

She thought dreadingly that being in love with Hare meant that she must tell a good many lies. Barbara was naturally truthful; it hurt to deceive, the more so as she knew that if her relation with Hare had not been unusual lies would not have been necessary.

The golden afternoon drew to a close. Barbara asked Hare the time, determined that she would not again let him be the one to propose departure. He looked at his watch, and rose, grudgingly.

"We must go, Barbara; we must go, dearest girl."

They clung in a last embrace. Then they left the little glade for ever behind them.

"Don't let's come back again," Hare said. "Let us always keep this afternoon as a precious memory that can't be duplicated."

The cars that they took back to Los Angeles seemed to Barbara to be hurrying the time along. All too soon she was on the train, standing in the vestibule with Hare, oppressed by the nearness of their parting. It seemed

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

strange that people could be getting on the train, indifferent as to when it started, or, indeed, anxious to have it go. The conductor and porter stood on the platform, waiting, with an occasional casual glance at Hare, for the signal of departure. They had seen too many leave-takings in their day to be curious about them.

"Remember, dearest," Hare said, holding Barbara's hands in his own, "that every revolution of the wheels takes you nearer to me. This isn't parting; it's getting ready to meet again."

"Yes," said Barbara, dully.

"Trust the future, Babbie mine."

"Yes," she repeated.

"All aboard!" called the conductor.

"Oh, I can't let you go!" said Barbara. "Come to the next station."

"Dearest, it would only mean parting sooner or later." He kissed her again and again. "Good-by, dear little love. Have courage and hope."

"Good-by, my beloved," she whispered.

Hare leaped off the moving train and turned to wave back at her. She stood on the steps, leaning forward for a last look at his handsome face, so full of tenderness for her. The train carried her sharply away and she went back blindly to her seat.

There followed a series of cities, which meant nothing to Barbara except that she could make phrases about them to Hare; there was a lucent view of sunset in San Francisco; a picture of Portland in its roses, and Seattle with its strange mixture of business activity and over-seas languor. It was with a sense of duty accomplished that she began the eastward trip through the Canadian Rockies. The mountains were wonderful, certainly richer than the Sierras, and doubtless to many more beautiful; but Barbara preferred the gaunt granite heights which had housed her idyl.

At last, at last, New York State and the little village

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

which lived for and by the sanitarium. The drive from the station seemed to Barbara the longest part of her journey. She inquired for the doctor who had Anita in charge, and learned, with gratitude, that he was busy. Then she asked if there were letters for her. How slow seemed the eyes and fingers of the secretary who looked over the pile of unclaimed mail! At length one was handed her.

It was from Hare. Barbara, her heart beating quickly, sat down in the most secluded corner of the reception-room. She was half afraid to open the letter, for she felt that it would mean everything to her. At last she tore it apart.

Dear little Love [it ran], you tell me to write about my work, but to-night I can write only about you. I miss you so utterly. I did not dream that I could so miss you in my busy life here. I wonder if you noticed I was a little preoccupied the first few hours after my return? That was because I was trying to reconcile the old and the new. Would my old life, I asked, a little push out Barbara, or would Barbara push out my old life? I could not tell. The test of absence was necessary. Now I have it and don't want it. I wish you were with me, dear. I'd like to see how you fitted into life here. I sit alone at night and dream of you.

Dear little Love, so many dreams. Surely when I go to you at Christmas they will all come true! Surely we are testing ourselves in every possible way. I need you to-night, and since I cannot have you, I ask life to give you to me—say six months from to-night. I think what it would be if I were sitting at my desk, mulling over the bit of research that is going to bring me reputation (for you, dear, I hope). You would be sitting beside the fire, to inspire me, when I looked at you, and in the end to crown the work. Ah, Barbara, let us hope it will come true. Write soon to

YOUR LEONARD.

Whatever there was of selfishness in the letter was hidden from Barbara. She only knew that Hare had written like a lover. Happy tears coursed down her cheeks, her fears fled away, and she said, with a little, tender laugh:

"Oh, my beloved, I will trust the future and you."

XV

HOME AGAIN

THE doctor who had Anita in charge explained to Barbara that she was an unusually difficult patient, that psycho-therapeutic cases, though sure, were slow, but that he thought some progress had been made, and much more could be made if the patient would remain under treatment for a few months longer. Barbara went to Anita's room. She found her sister-in-law lying on a sofa upon her little balcony. Her burning eyes, her thin, immobile face were unchanged. Barbara took her hands.

"Are you better, sister Anita?" she asked.

"Let go my hands; you hurt," Anita said, tonelessly. "No, I ain't better. I'll never be better in this world. When you killed Gilbert you half killed me."

So the old dreary round of hatred and accusation had returned. But it could not hurt Barbara any more, she told herself.

"The doctors think that if you stayed here longer you would be benefited."

"Wouldn't you love it to go back and have Grassmere all to your own self?" sneered Anita.

"I thought that you could go on renting it, and I could board in Charlottesville."

"The people who have had it don't want to keep it any longer. I ain't going to stay here after to-morrow. So you can make up your mind to it. Where's Leonard Hare?"

"In Pasadena, I believe," Barbara said.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"Ain't he going to help take me home on the way to get his mother?"

When Barbara explained that Mrs. Hare was already in Pasadena Anita acted as if she had been cheated. Attentive nurses and doctors had merely increased her self-centeredness. She would not believe that any other patient was quite so ill as she was.

In a queer, grudging way Anita was glad to see Barbara. "Your complexion's gone off," she said, "and it's too bad, for it was the only beauty you had. You are brown as a mulatto."

"But I feel better than I have for years," Barbara said. "I reckon I'll get through the school year without grip or anything of that sort."

"There's been a heap of sickness in Charlottesville this summer," Anita said with unction—"scarlet fever among the children, and typhoid fever among the grown people. Did you hear often from Stephen?"

"I got two or three letters from him. I did not answer very promptly."

"It's mighty queer you could be so busy on a vacation," said Anita, suspiciously.

"I was climbing almost every day from eight o'clock till six. My muscles are hard as whipcord."

"Your muscles don't help me," Anita replied. "Stephen wrote me that old Mrs. Langrel was dying. The mortgage he has on Rosegarland is almost for the full value. So one of these days he'll have two houses."

Barbara began to talk of some Charlottesville news which she had heard through a letter from one of her pupils, and Anita forgot, for a little while, to be bitter.

The journey home was difficult, but Barbara took it easily. With that letter of Hare's close to her heart no inconvenience of travel or of Anita's temper could trouble her. It was with a joy which she was unable to entirely conceal from Anita that she found herself again driving along the familiar red road which had once symbolized

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

all her longings. It had taken her away from hopelessness and dullness; it had taken her to the mountains and had given her almost all that she longed for; and some day it would bring Hare back to her, and then there would be her final heart's desire—certainty.

They came to the old fallen sycamore on which she had so often sat watching travelers pass by to some place where things would happen. Then they swept between the gate-posts and up the laurel drive to the square old house so dear to Barbara, and to be all the dearer, for she meant to fill it with thoughts and dreams of Leonard. On the porch stood Thornton and Lucia Streeter. Barbara thought, with a little pang, that in Lucia's large, calm air there was a touch of the proprietor. Anita had told her that some day she would be the mistress of Grassmere, and already she had a sense of possession. Anita, more uncanny than ever in her intuitions, said to Barbara:

"Looks like she thought she owned it now, doesn't she? She mustn't be too sure; I can always change my will. I ain't going to leave it to you, if I have to burn it, and I ain't going to have any one else counting on it."

Thornton came down the steps as the carriage stopped. "I didn't expect you on this train, Cousin Anita. Barbara wrote you'd arrive on the next. Lucia and I came over here to see that the house was all ready for you, and then we were going to the station to meet you."

"I did look for you," Anita said.

"I suppose I might have telegraphed after I found we could get the earlier train," Barbara explained, "but I knew you'd be pretty busy with Mrs. Langrel's illness."

Lucia Streeter's calm face put on an expression of gravity, and as she shook hands with Anita and Barbara she said: "Oh, poor thing! she'll not be ill much longer. She can scarcely live the day out."

Thornton carried Anita into the house. Barbara greeted Thias and Sissy, who were bobbing and smiling in the background.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"No letter for me, I suppose, Sissy?" she asked, with a faint hope that Hare might have written again.

"Law, no, Miss Barbara," Sissy replied. "I reckon every one knew you-all would be back to-day."

Barbara smiled. Every one, from Anita to Sissy, supposed that her life was centered in Albemarle County. Yet her heart was far west in Hare's gleaming white house set under live-oaks and palms, the paths bordered by flowers of vivid blue. It was a delicious secret. Yet as she passed through the wide doorway she wished that she could have brought her love to her old home.

Barbara and Lucia went into the library. They never had very much to say to each other. Barbara felt that Lucia must be a very admirable person or Thornton would not have cared for her. She realized that a man of Thornton's active, nervous type would have been attracted by Lucia's serene surface. She was not a mixture of languor and animation, like most Southern women; her large calm carried an intimation of mystery as well as repose. Yet Barbara was sure that the mystery was not really there. She thought Lucia only half alive, her repose part physical constitution and part stupidity. Here was a California type which did not appeal to her; she preferred Helen Farley or Annie Bestor.

They talked inconsequentially until Thornton entered. Barbara had sent for tea, and as he took a cup from her he said:

"You look mighty well, Barbara. It's done you good to get away. I told you it would."

"We all should have gone away," Lucia said. "Don't you think Stephen looks all worn out, Mrs. Rhodes? He has had only two weeks' vacation, and father and I had fairly to drag him away then. Albemarle County is the most wonderful place in the world, if you like, but not all the year round."

Lucia plainly intimated that when she was Mrs. Stephen Thornton her husband's vacations should be longer than

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

her fiancé's had been. Thornton frowned. He was not the sort of man who cared to have leading-strings exhibited to him. Barbara reflected that it was natural for a rich woman to assume that she should rule. She was glad, for Hare's sake, that she had not been brought up with the expectation of money.

"Stephen's been so devoted to Mrs. Langrel, poor soul," Lucia went on, "that he's had to do his professional work at all sorts of times. I've hardly seen him at all."

She smiled at him affectionately. Lucia had a beautiful smile, winning and comforting both. It took away from any reproach in her words.

"I'm a spoiled man," Thornton said. "Yes, it's been hard to watch Cousin Sophia dying."

"Don't you reckon it's been harder for her to live than to die?" Barbara said.

"She spoiled her own life," Lucia said. "Her pride was her obsession. What if she lost her child and was disgraced by her husband? Is that more than life deals out to most people? Is that any reason why she should hide behind a screen when people go to see her?"

Evidently Lucia was blaming poor Mrs. Langrel because she had seen so little of Thornton all summer.

"You see, I remember her when I was a little chap," Thornton said. "She was a beautiful woman then, and she held her head high. All of us have some one thing we can't endure; that's why we seize gratefully on lesser troubles and stand up against them. Cousin Sophia met the one thing her pride couldn't face—disgrace."

Barbara nodded appreciatively as she thought of the one thing she would be unable to face.

"A man would find it hard to meet failure in his work," Lucia said, "and a woman failure in love."

"No, I don't think that's quite it, after all," Barbara mused, aloud. "The thing we fear most, men and women both, is our own notion of disgrace. To some men failure in work would be a disgrace, and to others it

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

wouldn't. To some women to lose a lover would be disgrace, and to others to have the world know of the loss would mean the disgrace."

Lucia Streeter was by way of liking to make and to hear moralizing.

"One gratifying thing about human life and human beings," she said, "is that you can offer so many different interpretations of it, and then, so long as that's the case, living can never be quite stale."

She rose to go. Barbara remembered that the last time she had seen Thornton and Lucia together she had regarded them enviously, thinking how bitter it was to look at happiness through another's eyes. Now it was all so different. She felt a secret glad superiority to them; they loved each other, indeed, but no love could be so wonderful as hers and Hare's would be. As she shook hands with Thornton she saw how care-worn he seemed, and she felt glad that Hare's handsome face was unlined and fresh.

When they had gone Sissy brought her word that Anita had ordered supper to be served in her bedroom and that Barbara was to share the meal. Barbara had hoped that she might be alone, free to think of Hare. But she went up-stairs and took her seat at one side of the crowded little bedroom table. Anita eyed her suspiciously; but then Anita always did suspect her of something if she were ever alone with any of the neighbors.

"I reckon," Anita began, after Sissy had left the room, "that you will complain of me again, now you've come back."

"I never have complained of you, sister Anita."

"I reckon you hated to come back," Anita said, eying her narrowly. "Tell me who-all you met."

"I can't remember the names of all of them," Barbara said, composedly going on with her supper, "but I'll tell you about some of them."

She gave Anita an account of Annie Bestor, and from

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

that she went on to tell something of the daily life at Hilton's Camp.

"Didn't meet any new men, did you?" asked Anita, sharply.

"There were several men," Barbara returned.

She mentioned the names and occupations of some of the men she had met—dim personalities enough they seemed to her when she contrasted them with Hare.

"You don't talk like you were interested in any of them," Anita said.

"I wasn't, sister Anita, except as they could give me a hand now and again in climbing."

She looked up to find Anita's eyes glittering at her sardonically.

"Have you told me every single living soul that was there?" she asked.

Barbara knew by Anita's tone that she had found out that Hare had spent the summer in the camp. "I wrote you that Leonard Hare was there, didn't I?" she asked.

"You didn't," sneered Anita, "and you know you didn't! I had to come back here to find out. Sissy told me. Old Mrs. Hare got letters from him dated from there, and she told her other poor-white friends, and the negroes picked it up. Stephen knows—everybody knows."

"Why shouldn't they know?" asked Barbara, calmly. "Why shouldn't Leonard Hare go back to a summer resort where he's been before and where he is well known and well liked?"

"You made it up between you to be there together," stormed Anita. "That's why you-all plotted to get me to the sanitarium."

Here at least Barbara could speak the truth. "I didn't even know he was coming till I saw him there," she said. "As to plots, sister Anita, do you mean Stephen was in the plot as much as any one? He was the first one to try to get you to go to a sanitarium."

"You two made him," whimpered Anita.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"You mustn't excite yourself, sister Anita. I'm sorry if you think I forgot to tell you about Leonard Hare. He is a great friend of Miss Bestor and we three sat near one another at the table."

"You needn't think you're going to switch me off the main point," Anita said. "Did the fellow make love to you?"

"I cannot reply to you, sister Anita, when you talk to me in this fashion," Barbara said.

Anita was astonished. It was the first time Barbara had opposed her in any way since Gilbert's death.

"I've come to the conclusion," Barbara went on, "that whatever my debt to you is, it need not include constantly being insulted."

"I see through you," Anita said, fear striking her that she was going to lose Barbara. "You want to quarrel with me, so you can leave me."

"I told you that I would stay with you as long as you lived, and I will," Barbara said.

"How do I know what to believe?" shrilled Anita.

"I swore it over Gilbert's coffin," Barbara said, brokenly.

Anita felt relieved. Barbara, whom it was her one interest in life to bait, would be hers as long as tongue and mind would work.

"All the same, you've let that little upstart make love to you," Anita said. "Don't I know? Why else are your eyes so bright? Why else have you so much color? Why else do you have those little quiet smiles when you think I ain't looking? I ain't forgotten what my own youth was. You're happy. Some man loves you!"

"Suppose I had found some reason for being happy," Barbara said, slowly, "should it be denied me? I need something, surely, to make my days here tolerable. My service is yours; all of my life that comes under your eye is yours; but my thoughts are my own, and this summer was my own."

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"Keep it and welcome," Anita said. "If Leonard Hare made love to you it was because he thought you were going to inherit Grassmere. I know him through to his backbone—a climber he is and always will be. He'll want something with his wife. Did you tell him I was going to leave Grassmere to Stephen?"

"You know I haven't. You know you don't want our friends to know that I'm not to have the home of my own people. I can't see why you told Lucia Streeter."

"I see what you mean," Anita said. "This county has gotten the idea that you have wasted your youth in devotion to me and deserve a reward. Well, my will can explain everything, and I don't care what they say about me when I'm dead."

"Besides," went on Barbara, calmly, "you forget that Grassmere would not seem much in the way of wealth to Leonard Hare. He's been thinking in Northern terms of money."

"I—I don't know what has got into you," Anita gasped. "You wouldn't have dared talk to me in this style before you went away. If you think that by running down Grassmere you're going to get me to leave it to you, you're mistaken."

"You've never got me to say I didn't want Grassmere, but the last thing in the world I'll do is scheme to get it. If you've had all the supper you want, sister Anita, I'll read to you for a while."

Anita, worn out by the journey and by her outburst, fell asleep while Barbara read. Then Barbara put out the lamp and went down-stairs and out upon the porch, where she could be alone with her thoughts of Hare. The scent of the roses came strong from the garden; the frogs were croaking in the pond; young Thias was singing a mournful song, and far away, beside the grove, she could see a faint blur of white which was Gilbert's headstone. There was a time when Barbara would have judged the

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

setting a meet one for sad thoughts, but she took it now as fitting with her own joyful thoughts of Hare.

She tried to visualize him. It was almost nine o'clock; with him it would be almost six. Suppose he were returning from his office, since his office hours were over at five. He liked walking, and so he would be going briskly along the wide street on which his house was set. She could see the live-oaks and palms and pepper-trees overhanging the sidewalk. She could see the neat bungalows, well back from the street, beautiful flowering shrubs about them. Hare would pass them swiftly, with that splendid, masterful walk she loved. He would enter his own gate and pass between the bushes of blue flowers. He would go up-stairs to his study and—yes—there would be the letter from her. He would read it, again and again, and then he would turn his face eastward and wish for the presence of his love.

Ah, but how fully she was his! She had taken the new tone with Anita because she was no longer wholly in pledge to Anita. Hare had a right to her, too, and in time to come it would prove the bigger right. She must always belong to somebody, evidently, but her greater loyalty would go where her love went. Perhaps, after all, she really had worked out her debt to Anita, as Hare had said.

She heard steps upon the dark drive—not the shuffling steps of a negro. Barbara's heart leaped; perhaps it was Hare. Then she chided herself for her folly, but she knew that every unexpected step, every letter, every telegram, would give her that same irrational hope of his nearness or at least his message. The steps came closer. A man's figure loomed out of the darkness, and she knew it to be that of Thornton.

"Is that you, Stephen?" she called.

"Yes."

He came up the steps and sat beside her,

"Has anything happened?"

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"Cousin Sophia has just died, Barbara," he said, wearily. "I wish you'd come over in the morning if Anita will spare you."

"Of course I'll come, Stephen."

"There'll be other neighbors, too, but no youngish people except you and me. I'm going back in a few minutes, but I had to get away from the house for a while."

"I reckon it's been a strain for you, Stephen," she said.

"She kept murmuring, 'My only son, my only son,' when she was half unconscious. But I don't think she suffered much. She told me a week ago that she had never looked back on any joy without having the memory marred by the grief that was its aftermath, but she could look forward to the peace of death with the certainty that it could not be destroyed."

"My only memory of her is as she is now," Barbara said.

"You were too little to know what a gay, wonderful creature she was. The house was always full of guests and flowers and laughter. Barbara, Barbara, I've been wondering what it is that gives people the courage to fight when all they valued goes. For poor Cousin Sophia did fight. All the world thinks she was passive. Lucia thinks she was undisciplined, if not cowardly, but I know she did fight."

"People often do, I suppose, when we don't give them credit for it," Barbara said.

"I knew Cousin Sophia as no one else did," Thornton went on. "I know of difficulties she's had, of sorrows no one else guesses."

"You've been a comfort to her, Stephen," Barbara murmured.

He went on as if he had not heard her. "I've seen many people die—my father, but he died after my mother. He had not had many griefs. I've seen death in the streets, death on the water, but all these deaths did not give me the sense of defeat and loss that Cousin Sophia's

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

does. I feel like a school-girl. I could weep at the waste in the world."

Barbara had never seen Thornton when he was not radiating optimism and purpose.

"I'm talking as if I had temperament," Thornton said, with a short laugh. "I reckon my nerves are overstrung. The minute Cousin Sophia was dead I found myself cursing like a trooper at one of the negroes who howled in the hall that he felt her spirit go by. I wanted to smash his fool head."

"She must have had joy sometimes, Stephen," Barbara said, almost pleadingly. "She was happy when she was a young girl in England, and when she came out here on a visit, and when she first married your cousin."

"Yes, of course," Thornton said.

"Everybody has some joy," Barbara went on, and as she spoke she forgot Mrs. Langrel and thought only of herself and Hare. "The lesson that all these sad old people teach is that if we young ones get any chance at happiness we must take it, no matter what the cost is."

"Take it at some one else's expense?" asked Thornton.

"No-o, I don't quite mean that," Barbara said, slowly. "I reckon I mean we oughtn't to let too many scruples bother us—scruples about conventions, and what the world might say, and what's right and wrong."

Thornton was looking at her curiously in the darkness, and she colored.

"I reckon I've jumped away from poor Mrs. Langrel," she said, "but it's not because I'm not mighty sorry about it all, Stephen."

"I know you are. It's done me good to talk to you for these few minutes," he said. "I always do have a satisfied feeling after I've been with you. I've got to go back now. The man that works the place is there, with his wife, but they won't want to stay all night. Of course the negroes are all gone."

"I'll come as early as I can in the morning, Stephen."

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

After he had gone she went up-stairs to her own room to resume her happy dreams. She thought of the old days when she dreaded leisure because all her reflections were sad or hopeless. Now leisure could never be long enough, because it could never be anything but joyful. She sat for a long time at the window, savoring the sweet September night. At last, reluctantly, she rose, remembering her promise to Thornton for the next day. She was just ready to go to bed when she heard a long peal of harsh laughter from Anita's room.

She hurried down the hall and, tapping at Anita's door, she entered, her eyes questioning. Anita was sitting up in bed, still laughing, her burning eyes malicious.

"Is anything wrong, sister Anita?" Barbara asked.

"Not with me," Anita said in a croaking voice. "I understand now. I know why your face has the look of a bride's—you wanton!"

Barbara came close to Anita, holding her candle high above her head, her mouth hard, her eyes fierce.

"I told my dead Gilbert that I would never leave you," she said in a low tone, "but if you ever dare to speak like that to me again I'll break my oath and go out of this house for ever!"

Anita sank whimpering on her pillows, and Barbara went back to her room, her happy mood shattered.

XVI

A RETURN

"I AM the resurrection and the life."

The immemorial words sounded solemnly through the little gray church on the windy slope. The Honorable Sophia Langrel lay before the altar, her early pomps and the happiness she had demanded as a right, her later griefs and her prayer for peace, alike forgotten. Behind her sat the people beside whom her life had run, friends to whom that life had taken on a commonplace aspect simply because it was a fact. Now as they listened to the grave words of the service of eternal death and eternal life, they saw in part the tragedy of her days, and in part they felt the significance of that last call which is the one certain equality, and to which the proudest head must bend.

Barbara, at the little organ, was moved by the poignancy of the hour, and yet unconsciously she was thinking of the words in which she would describe it to Hare. She wanted him to share the sad but ennobling experience with her, and she longed to have his comfort, his assurance that, whatever might be their lot at the end, yet the immediate future would give them joy abounding.

The pall-bearers, Thornton and Mary Thornton's young husband at their head, bore the dead woman into the churchyard. The clergyman and the congregation followed. Anita had insisted on coming, and she sat on the back seat of the old surrey, Sissy supporting her, and watched the last rites at the grave. Her bright, malicious eyes were veiled; she was remembering the hour, nearly

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

ten years before, when she had seen all that she loved consigned to the earth, and had vowed, wildly, that what she had lost in love she would pay for in hate.

There were a few people who lingered until the grave had been filled with raw earth and then covered with the deep-red roses which the dead woman had loved and which she had worn in her hair and at her throat in the days when her heart was still imperious. Barbara and Lucia Streeter stood with Thornton until all the others had gone. Then Barbara said to Anita:

"I'd like to go back to the house with Stephen, sister Anita, unless you expect me to drive home at once with you. Lucia Streeter wants to stay there with him for a few minutes, and she can hardly go without me. Would it be too much for you to come?"

Anita's veiled eyes sparkled with malice. "Oh, let us preserve the proprieties by all means," she said. "I'll go along. I wouldn't miss going along for the world."

Barbara rejoined Lucia and Thornton. They took a short cut through the fields, arriving at Rosegarland at the same time that Anita drove up to the lawn. The negress who was the cook stood at the doorway, looking anxiously, sometimes within the house and sometimes at the approaching group. She advanced to meet Thornton.

"Dey's a strange gen'leman come," she said in a whisper. "He done go straight to Mis' Sophi's room and shet de do'."

Thornton went up-stairs, followed by Barbara and Lucia. The room in which Sophia Langrel had died was locked. He knocked upon the door; there was no answer, and he knocked again. A hesitating footfall sounded within, and then the door was thrown open. A thin, unhealthy-looking man stood on the threshold. His face was dissipated, weak, even craven, but it bore an unmistakable likeness to the proud beauty that had once been Sophia Langrel.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"It is William Langrel," Thornton said. "I had a premonition that it was you."

"I came straight to the house," Langrel said in a low, hesitating tone. "When I got here this place was sickly with the smell of flowers and the servants said my mother was being buried."

"Suppose we come down-stairs," Thornton said, quietly.

Barbara and Lucia preceded the men to the drawing-room. Barbara felt a sense of dismay and of irritation. Why should this man, who looked like a wastral, appear now, to be another pensioner upon Thornton's time and energy? In the drawing-room they found Anita lying on the sofa. She laughed shrilly as they entered.

"You didn't know me, William, did you, when you asked me who was being buried?" she said. "Do you know me now?"

Barbara and Thornton exchanged a glance. Why had Langrel said he did not know his mother was being buried until after he had reached Rosegarland?

"Yes, I reckon I know you," said Langrel, struggling to conceal a look of distaste.

"It is too bad you didn't arrive before, William," Thornton said.

"No one knows how hard I tried to get here," Langrel replied in a quavering, almost a whining tone. "I've wandered over the whole world."

"We had word, and what we thought were proofs, that you were dead, you know," Thornton said.

"Yes, and at the time I was a failure and I let the report stand. I thought it would be better for my mother to think of me dead than as a man who couldn't find his place in the world. I always had the hope that I would make her proud of me yet, and then I meant to come back."

"Oh, you should have come, a failure or not," Barbara said, impulsively.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"If you could have heard her crying, 'My only son, my only son,' maybe you'd have wanted to come," Anita said.

Langrel's face worked and he burst into tears. Lucia rose; she could not bear displays of strong feeling. She left the room with an appealing look at Thornton.

"It's too late now, William," Thornton said. "We'll do the best we can for you."

Langrel looked up and a sharp expression crossed his face. "I say, what is the status here?" he asked. "Who's been staying with mother?"

"I have, since she's been ill," Thornton said. "By the way, I noticed you at her safe as I came in."

Langrel colored. "I always had one of the keys of that safe," he murmured.

"I believe I've been told something of the sort," Thornton said, dryly.

Long ago Barbara had heard rumors that when young Langrel had run away from home he had stolen some of his mother's money and jewelry.

"I see no reason," blustered Langrel, "why I should not examine my mother's papers, since I'm master here."

Anita laughed again. "Are you sure of that?" she shrilled.

Barbara sighed painfully. Would Anita's hate never be slaked? Would she always feed on scenes of strife and pain?

"I reckon we'd better go home, sister Anita," she said.

"Why should we go home?" Anita asked. "We're all cousins together, and William had just as well not nurse false hopes."

"False—false hopes?" stammered Langrel.

"I reckon you've got your mother's will in your coat," Anita said. "I reckon you found that."

Involuntarily Langrel's hand crept to his breast-pocket.

Anita laughed again. "I thought so," she said, "but how much do you reckon she had to leave?"

"What if I have got the will?" Langrel said. "I've no

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

objection to telling you what's in it. Mother mentions Stephen's kindness to her, and she says that she leaves him what little she remains possessed of, but that if by any strange chance I should ever be found alive I am to get it during my life, and Stephen is to have it after my death. I am forbidden to sell the place or to part with the furniture, plate, and jewelry."

"You've made good use of your time," Anita said. "She mentions, doesn't she, that the place is mortgaged to Stephen?"

"Look here, Anita," Thornton said, "suppose we cut out all this? Langrel must be feeling the shock of his mother's death, even though it's years since he saw her—"

"It's been hard," quavered Langrel, "to come back, when I'd counted on getting her forgiveness—"

"She did forgive you," Barbara said, softly.

"We can talk business later," Thornton said. "Technically the house is yours, and if you want me to move out—"

"I want you to stay," Langrel said, hastily. "I want you to stay till—till we get things straightened out."

"William, you never would take advice," Anita said; "but don't let your hopes tower. Stephen holds a mortgage on Rosegarland and it's for almost as much as the place is worth."

"Anita," said Thornton, irritably, "all that can wait."

Langrel hesitated. Then he said, confidently: "I reckon mother wasn't given to talking over her affairs with you, Cousin Anita. There are the bonds Stephen has been handling for her. She assigned them to him in blank, for I've found the receipt he gave her for them."

He looked triumphantly at Anita, and then shifted his gaze to Thornton.

"I wish all this could have waited," said Thornton, gravely, "and I wish the business could have been between you and me, William, without auditors; but the fact is that there are no bonds left. You may not know that

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

your mother bought a place for your father in an old man's home, and gave him a small annuity. Some seven or eight years ago, a little while before his death, he ran away and went to Richmond. When he had spent a large sum of money gambling in Richard Bower's den he forged the brother, Robert Bower's, name on a big check, meaning to go abroad with the money. Richard Bower cashed it, and I've always believed he knew it was forged. I had to redeem the check, and pay hush-money besides. Your mother could not have borne the publicity of this disgrace."

Langrel bowed his head in his hands. Barbara could scarcely forbear sending a reproachful look to Anita.

"I—I thought mother had cast him off," Langrel said at last. "Did she give you a written authority to use the bonds in this way?"

Thornton paused imperceptibly. "She certainly authorized me," he said, firmly. "You can't think she'd cast off your father any more than she'd cast you off, William. There's plenty of proof, if you mean that. The bonds scarcely aggregated twenty-five thousand dollars in value. You've come back to a diminished estate, it is true, but you've a future ahead of you, if you want it. You can work this place along new lines and you can make it pay. There's a fortune in apples alone. If you put your back into it you can make good. By degrees you can pay off the mortgage and own every rod of Rosegarland free."

Thornton had spoken in a strong, inspiring voice, and an expression of hope and resolution came into Langrel's weak face. Then it faded, and he said:

"Work hard and pay off the mortgage, and what for? For you; the place is to go to you, ultimately. If I married—"

"You know I'll do the square thing by you, William. If you marry and have children I'll deed my rights back to them. Cousin Sophia would, of course, want that. I

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

think," Thornton added, reproachfully, "that she believed you dead, but that sometimes she had visions that you might come back, an old man, just to die here. She said something like that to me once. I don't believe your marriage had occurred to her. She always thought of you as the lad you were when you left her. I reckon she couldn't think of you as a man, leaving his mother grieving for him!"

Weak tears came to Langrel's eyes. "I'd better go," he said. "I was of no use to my mother, and I come back to find her dead and my home gone."

"Now don't you go to sentimentalizing," Anita admonished him. "That was just what your father always did. You know right well you've got no intention of going. I reckon you've got your mind all made up to let Stephen look after you like he did your mother."

Thornton turned an exasperated face to Barbara. "I reckon I'll have to carry you away now, sister Anita," Barbara said. "The sun's getting low and you can't afford to take cold. Besides, you must have your supper hot or else you'll be sick all night."

"What if I am? I'm used to it," Anita snapped.

Thornton prepared to carry her out to the surrey. Anita would have been glad to stay longer, but the cream of her enjoyment had been skimmed, and, besides, she was exhausted with the excitement she had been through and ready for food and bed. She yielded to Thornton and departed with a final shot at Langrel:

"If you work real hard, William, Stephen will see that you get your just dues."

Langrel scowled after her, and then said to Barbara, "It's hard to come back to all this—when I've been hoping for years—"

"I'm so very sorry for you, Cousin William," Barbara said, "but you've got a chance to atone to Cousin Sophia for letting her die without seeing you. She'd want you to live at Rosegarland, and make a success of it, and have the

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

Langrel name looked up to once more. It would be a wonderful atonement."

Barbara's face was glowing, and Langrel looked at her admiringly.

"If you'll help me, Barbara," he pleaded.

"All I can," she said, meeting his outstretched hand.

She tried to speak cordially, but his weakness and sentimentality repelled her. Measured by Hare or by Thornton, he was a cheap creature, too cheap to have won the dignity of the grief of a woman like Sophia Langrel.

During the drive to Grassmere Anita lay back against Barbara's arm wearily. Barbara looked at her, and then turned away from the expression of hateful pleasure on that withered, yellow face. The girl flew to the thought of her lover with passionate gratitude. Oh, he was a solace for all that was sad or distasteful in life; she need never again be distressed while she had the haven of him. She came back from an ecstatic dream of him to find Anita's eyes fixed on her face with baleful amusement.

"Lawsy me," sighed Anita, "I wouldn't die now for anything, what with all I know about you and your goings-on, and William coming back to think he could squeeze money out of Rosegarland."

The academy opened, and day after day Barbara rode to her work, a part of everything about her—the blue of the sky, the yellow and scarlet shimmer of the first autumn leaves, the glinting little pools that Kirby splashed through. It was a joy to greet little Bobby, and her tenderness for him took on a new depth, for she thought she had a fuller understanding of the riches of motherhood. She greeted her pupils with an especial sense of protectiveness, though she reflected, with a strained smile, that the world would say she ought not to have those innocent souls in charge. Their mothers, did they know of her love-idyl, would be horrified, would consider her smirched. Yet Barbara had no conviction of stain. She was sure that her morality

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

was as high a thing as it had been before she had gone to the mountains.

A second letter came from Hare, as tender as the first, speaking as ardently of missing her, and trusting to their future. She was so preoccupied with this, and with the physical reaction Anita had shown after her attendance at Mrs. Langrel's funeral, that she concerned herself very little with the excitement of the county over Langrel's reappearance. His immediate neighbors called on him, and, struck by the obvious drama of his return on the day of his mother's funeral, were inclined to pity him fully, whatever blame they would ordinarily have had for him being absorbed in sympathy for his bereavement.

Several days after the funeral Barbara was sitting on the porch, listening to the call of the Bob White, and remembering how it had been Hare's signal to her in those radiant days in the Sierras. She was thinking wistfully of him. For twenty-four hours she had been waiting for his letter, and it had not come. With her reason she could make plenty of allowance for unavoidable delay. But satisfied reason is not a satisfied heart. Anita, too, had been unusually trying; her partial convalescence had been marked by monologues of sly innuendo. Had she been even in her ordinary state of illness Barbara would not have allowed them to pass, but, considering Anita's condition, the girl fell back upon her old refuge of silence.

The waning moon reminded her of one of her hours with Hare. They had loved each other in the high, stern silences of the Sierras. How sweet it would be, she thought, to love each other here, where the atmosphere was soft, and where the scent of flowers abounded and the birds were never quite silent, even at nightfall. And, as always, she tried to picture what he might be doing; but now she found that, after a little more than three weeks' absence, his handsome, lustrous face would come at call only faintly; the strong, lissome figure receded into nothingness.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

By the moonlight she made out Thornton walking quickly up the drive. When he was quite near she saw that his face was grave, his eyes fixed.

"Are you alone, Barbara?" he asked.

"A gratuitous question, Stephen. I am always alone. What is it?" she said.

She rose to meet him, and as he did not take the chair she indicated she stood beside him in the shadows.

"Lucia is in Charlottesville, you know," he said. "I had to come to you."

"Then something is the matter?"

"I am afraid so," he said. "The day after Cousin Sophia was buried William and I came to an agreement. I was to live with him and help him run the farm. We were to share all expenses in the way of housekeeping and general output for the farm. At the end of the year we were to examine our books, William was to receive a reasonable salary for his work as manager, and the remainder was to be divided equally. Then out of his share William was to apply what he could in payment of the mortgage I hold upon Rosegarland. I never charged Cousin Sophia interest, and I didn't mean to charge him."

"It's wonderfully generous of you, Stephen," said Barbara, half indignantly, "especially as William will make no sort of manager and you'll have to do all the real work there."

"My notion was to try to develop his self-respect and to make him want to work," Thornton said; "but I'm talking in the past tense. All that was the bargain we made. I went to Charlottesville in the afternoon; when I got back he wasn't in the house or on the place. When he didn't come in to supper I thought perhaps he had gone over to Grassmere. He seemed to be tremendously taken with you."

"I am afraid that doesn't flatter me," said Barbara, shortly.

"When he didn't come back that night I suspected that

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

something was wrong. The next day I had to go to Richmond on business for Mr. Streeter. When I was making for my train on my way back I saw William in a motor-car in the company of General Bower."

"How contemptible of Cousin William!" Barbara said. "He didn't take your word for it that Cousin Sophia had told you to hand over those bonds to Bower to save her husband!"

"That's what I thought," Thornton said. "I tried to be reasonable about it. I said to myself that Langrel had been rubbing shoulders with all sorts of people, that he'd seen a good deal of the seamy side of life. I'd offered him a good thing of it at Rosegarland, and he began to ask himself if I was square. Why should I be giving him the easy end of the bargain unless I was paying conscience-dues?"

"Perhaps that was it," Barbara said.

"This afternoon," Thornton went on, "when I came back from town I found that William had returned. I didn't like the face he showed me at the door when I came in. I didn't like his manner during supper. We went out on the porch afterward with our cigars, and then he said he'd be glad if I'd make an accounting for his mother's bonds, for which he had my receipt."

"What did he mean?" exclaimed Barbara.

"I saw, fast enough," Thornton said. "Cousin Sophia had given me an oral, and not a written, authority to pass over the bonds to the Bowers. I ought to have got the written authority, of course, but it was a miserable business all around, and she was bowed to the dust over the shame of it. I didn't want to trouble her more than I had to. William had guessed that I had done it on oral authority. I explained my motives carefully, and told him that if he wanted to rake up the old matter General Bower could prove all I said. Robert Bower, as you know, is dead."

"What did he say to that?" Barbara asked.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"He looked at me in a shifting, sideways fashion, and replied that he had seen General Bower, who said that the bonds had not been given him to square the forged check, but that I had sold them to him as my own, and that he had paid for them in cash."

"Oh, I don't understand!" murmured Barbara.

"It means," Thornton said, heavily, "that Bower and William have fixed the thing up between them. William will sue me to recover the amount of the bonds, and he's got the receipt I gave Cousin Sophia as proof that I owe them to him. Bower will swear I represented that the bonds were my own. There will be only my bare word that what I say is the truth."

"But I remember what you told me about it this spring," Barbara said. "I'll go in court and swear to it."

"As if I'd let you, my dear! And, besides, such testimony won't go for much."

"Before we go into that," Barbara said, "tell me why Bower is ready to perjure himself to injure you."

"Because he thinks I injured him. When I was practising in Richmond I made him settle out of court in the case of a young man whom he had mulcted out of twenty thousand dollars. I can't prove it, for the young man is dead. I upset his scheme to put a rotten franchise through the council. He's as vindictive as an Indian—or as poor Anita."

"But, Stephen," said Barbara, lowering her voice at the mention of Anita, "in the courts don't they go somewhat on the character of the witnesses and plaintiffs and defendants?"

"They do, Barbara, but you must remember what a shrewd old fox General Bower is. He had a magnificent Civil War record, for which much is always forgiven. Though he ran a gambling-den, it was not in his name, and he was never arrested. He is on the board of several charitable organizations. Oh, he's covered his tracks, all right. He can afford at least one such turn up as this."

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"But William—"

"William is the repentant prodigal son, coming home too late. He's a picturesque figure, to whom sympathetic hearts will turn. As for me, Barbara—well, I'm a young man who wouldn't be a doctor, after a small fortune had been spent on him; who tried law in Charlottesville, and then tried it in Richmond, and left his firm there, and came back to Charlottesville. By the time people were ready to forget that I made my poor old father turn in his grave by refusing to be a doctor, then I recalled myself to them by getting arrested in Bower's gambling-den. I couldn't explain that I'd gone there to get old Langrel out, and perhaps I shouldn't have been believed if I had. I don't know whether you ever heard of that arrest? At any rate, it gave me a reputation among some good people of being a wild young man. I had to withdraw from the law firm in which I was because I took too many cases against corporations. I've got scores of capitalists and business men down on me, and one Richmond newspaper. My God, Barbara, I've got no chance in this thing!"

"Oh, Stephen!" she cried, impulsively seizing his hands. "What can we do?"

"Don't you see?" he said in a hoarse tone. "It means my ruin. Embezzlement, stealing, unfaith to the dead. I'm a disgraced man!"

"Stephen! Stephen!" she cried, "your friends won't believe it. Every one knows how good you were to Cousin Sophia—"

"The world will believe what the courts tell it to believe, Barbara," Thornton said. "At the end of the lawsuit I'll be almost penniless and professionally ruined. And Lucia—"

Barbara clung to his hands. "She'll stand by you; we all will," she said. "I'll go up and down the county, if I must, telling what I know. You must let me testify in court for you, Stephen. It may help. It will show the faith your friends have in you. I'll tell what I know of

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

all you did for Cousin Sophia. Stephen, say you'll have hope!"

He pressed her hands. "I have gratitude, my dear. I'll make the best fight I can, and it will be all the better because you believe in me."

XVII

THE VERDICT

A CHILL November rain was beating down when Barbara dismounted before the Charlottesville court-house. Sissy had warned her that morning, when she had started for town, that it was going to rain, and she had better drive or take the train. But Barbara had insisted that the weather would hold; she was reluctant to admit that the dreary days were coming, because they seemed to push so far away the golden hours of the summer. She had not informed any member of the household that the academy was closed on account of an epidemic of scarlet fever, because she knew that she would be expected to remain at Grassmere, and she wanted to let Thornton see that she was losing no opportunity of standing by him.

She sent a negro with Kirby to the nearest livery-stable, and, entering the building, took her way to the room in which the case of Langrel *vs.* Thornton was being tried. Always she went into that room with an inward shudder of disgust, remembering the day she had been called as a witness. She had gone against Anita's protests. Anita, increasingly unreasonable as her vitality grew less, had come to think that Thornton had disgraced his name, since he was the defendant in such an ominous accusation as the embezzlement of funds. Her dislike of Langrel did not mitigate her resentment against Thornton.

It had been an uncomfortable experience. Barbara had stated, very definitely, what Thornton had told her in the

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

spring about his business relations with Mrs. Langrel. Thornton's lawyer, Marshall, had treated her very deferentially, and she had felt that her testimony was making some impression upon the jury. Then Langrel's lawyer began his cross-examination. Barbara was not accustomed to the peculiar ethics of the witness-stand, and it had taken all her self-control to keep down her temper at the fashion in which her statements were attacked. She was asked why she could be so very certain of the day on which Thornton's confidences had been made. Barbara saw at once that the expression "confidences" had impressed the jury; she saw equally that she could not say that the day was marked for her by the fact that she and Thornton had talked over little Mary Thornton's affairs and had also promised each other to be the best of friends. She replied, truthfully enough, that she kept a diary, and had happened to put down, in a general way, the record of her conversation with Thornton.

But the lawyer had gone on questioning, subtly implying that her testimony was too exact to be true. His manner as he glanced now at her and now at Thornton had been insinuating, and in this he was assisted by Langrel's confederate, General Bower, the white-haired old man of fixed, benign expression. Barbara had realized that the opposition was trying to prove that she had a sentimental regard for Thornton, who was using her as a tool. Langrel's lawyer endeavored to bring out in his cross-examination that Thornton had heard in the spring that Langrel was alive and had then made his confidences to Barbara, with the intention of using her later, if necessity arose. Although Marshall made many objections, and many questions were ordered to be stricken from the records, still Barbara could see the effect Langrel's lawyer was building up. He meant that the jury and the spectators should be filled with a sense of distress that a dead woman and her prodigal son should be cheated.

Thornton saw Barbara enter the court-room, and his

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

tired face brightened. The spectators were few in number, and Barbara was glad of that. A little knot of poor people whom Thornton had been kind to nearly always came. A good many of Bower's old military subordinates attended, and three or four of the Charlottesville Langrels, to whose sympathy Langrel had managed to appeal. Lucia Streeter had never once been present. As Barbara took her seat a gust of heavy rain beat against the windows, and she felt that the dreary weather fitted the proceedings. Her depression was due not merely to Thornton's difficulty, but to the course her own affairs were taking.

Barbara looked about at the different people in court who interested her—at Marshall, a big, urbane man, with bland eyes and an earnest turn of mind, anxious to take all things into consideration, wishing to analyze all reasons. Langrel's lawyer was a thin man with a gray, smeary shade of eye, and a mouth ready for harsh badinage. One of the jurors had truculent eyes, another had a hairy, lean face, a third scratched his head on the slightest provocation. Barbara resented the flavor of their egotism, their mixture of self-importance, curiosity, and self-satisfaction. It was the last day of the trial, and the lawyers on each side were to summarize their arguments. Barbara, up to the time of this case, had always had an unthinking respect for the law; she had assumed that it was synonymous with justice. But she had come to the conclusion that justice or right or wrong had little to do with the matter; it all narrowed down to the power of human persuasion.

She was filled with a sort of sick rage as she listened to the prosecuting attorney and looked at the complacent faces of Langrel and Bower. The lawyer was acquainted with Thornton; he knew that in all his record the only nominal stain was his arrest in the gambling-house; he knew that the neighborhood prejudice against him in his student days had been unfounded; he knew that pro-

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

professionally Thornton had always been on the side of the under dog, so great had been his passion for fairness. He must have known, Barbara thought, that all that Thornton had done for Mrs. Langrel had been for the sake of affection and pity, and not from any hope of gain. Yet the man deliberately represented Thornton as a thief. He represented Bower as a noble savior of his country. He pictured Langrel as sick and discouraged in a foreign land, working against mountainous difficulties to make a record of which his old mother could be proud, and coming back with his little but honorably won success to find her dead and a stranger in his place.

Barbara did not realize that it was the business of Langrel's lawyer to see only one side, to the end of getting a verdict for his client. She could only sit heartsick at seeing the jury swayed by his speech—and no more by his words than by the silent verdict of the spectators, which was against Thornton. There were present, too, many Confederate soldiers whose faith in General Bower's integrity was as strong as their faith in Virginia. Barbara could feel the keen advocacy of these old men sweeping toward the jury-box like the old-time steady movement of their infantry ranks.

Marshall was admirable. He made the most of his client's splendid record in the law and his devotion to Mrs. Langrel's interests. But he could not prove by documents that Thornton had never received any interest upon the mortgage which he held against Rosegarland, nor could he deny the fact that Thornton had been arrested with a group of the most disreputable gamblers in Charlottesville. He could not deny that Thornton had given Mrs. Langrel a receipt for her bonds and had no written authorization to dispose of them as he saw fit. He laid bare the tawdry story of the elder Langrel's sin and shames, stripping aside, in his attempt to save Thornton, all the defenses which the dead woman had so carefully built against the world. But for the story of the forged

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

check Marshall had no proof. Moreover, he had no means of shaking Bower's steady and injured denial that the bonds had been given him to offset the check. There was no overt proof against Bower's character, nor could he make any overt attack upon it without laying himself open for libel. He believed in his client's innocence, but thought that Thornton had shown most unbusiness-like folly in not having got a signed and witnessed statement from Mrs. Langrel, stating to what use the bonds had been put. In his efforts to move the old war-dogs sitting alertly behind Bower he made the most of the war record of Thornton's father and uncle; but Thornton's father had been only a lieutenant and his uncle a colonel, while Bower was a general, and Thornton's mother had come from a Union family.

Barbara, listening to Marshall's eloquent plea, was not deceived into hope; the case would go against Thornton. She listened carefully to the judge's impersonal instructions to the jury; he at least was a true servant of justice, not indicating on which side his sympathies lay. The jury filed out of the box and retired to deliberate. The spectators began to disperse, the old soldiers lingering about Bower, as if they were his body-guard. Thornton was in consultation with his attorney, but he kept glancing toward Barbara. She knew he meant to ask her to lunch with him, and she hurried out, for she wanted to be alone.

She went to the nearest hotel for luncheon, her mind dropping away from Thornton's troubles to a consideration of her own. For she feared that the test of absence which Hare had decreed was beginning to tell not for her, but against her. During the first month his letters had been wonderful. Then he had undergone a slight operation which had kept him in the hospital for a day or two, and from that time on his letters had failed, emotionally. The beginnings had changed from "Dear Little Love" to "Dear Little One," then to "Dear One," while the last

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

had begun with "Dear." Barbara assured herself that the change was due to the depression of spirits caused by his physical condition. She was counting the days till Christmas. When he should see her again all would be as it had been before. Meantime, she feared the day of the arrival of his letter as she had once longed for it.

She fought against brooding thoughts as she ate her luncheon, feeling that she must go under if she let herself think that Hare's dwindling affection could be permanent. It would be unendurable to admit that hypothesis, for that would mean that she would search for the reason and would presently be accusing herself for her surrender. She had given herself freely, without weighing right and wrong; she did not want to ponder in retrospect, for that, at best, would be degrading. The matter would then be reduced to a consideration, not of ethics, but of tactics. In yielding had she not made a bad bargain for herself?

She got a magazine and went back to the court-house. The verdict was not expected for hours, and if she stayed till it was brought in she would be very late in getting home, and thus evoke Anita's blame. But she felt that she could not desert Thornton, the more so since Lucia had not the courage to appear in the court-room. Barbara felt that she and Thornton were, in a way, companions in misery, and she meant to give him all the help she could. He was not present when she entered, and she sat alone until mid-afternoon, when he joined her.

"It's a bad day for you to come out, Barbara," he said. "I needn't tell you how proud I am of the way you have stood by me."

"Plenty of people are standing by," she said, "but they can't all come into the court."

He sighed, thinking of Lucia. "I don't believe we'll have to wait very long," he said; "the jury won't waste much time considering their verdict. The longer they stay out the more hope there will be for me."

Marshall came in and beckoned to him. Thornton rose

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

and left Barbara. At the same moment a bailiff approached with a note for her. It was a mere line from Lucia Streeter, and it read, "Please come to me as soon as the verdict is delivered." Barbara frowned a little. She could not forgive Lucia for not having sat with Thornton during every hour that he was under fire. Her excuse of illness did not seem sufficient; illness was not illness when it permitted one to drive every day. Yet Thornton apparently excused Lucia, and Barbara knew that she had no right to condemn any one else for cowardice. In certain ways no one could be a greater coward than herself.

The afternoon dragged on. Early twilight closed in and the gas was lighted. A few spectators entered, and Thornton and Marshall conversed together with an air of tense repose. Langrel and his lawyer appeared, and presently Bower and some of his old soldiers. A thrill of expectancy ran through the court-room and two or three people in the rear moved up toward the front. Minute after minute went by, and the tension did not relax. Barbara found herself gripping her hands together and murmuring:

"Oh, if things don't go right for Stephen how can I expect them to go right for me?"

The jurymen returned to the court-room, the judge asked the foreman a question, and then, breaking the dead silence, came his statement:

"We find the defendant guilty."

It seemed astounding to Barbara that half a dozen words could make so much difference in a man's life. One moment a man could be free and hopeful, the next moment he could be condemned and ruined. How could time be an impervious abstract thing when its mere passing carried so much significance? There was a little rustle in the court-room. An old woman whose son Thornton had befriended began to sob; a bailiff rapped for order, and the judge delivered his decision. Thornton was to

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

pay to Langrel the equivalent in money of the bonds, with interest from the day they had been disposed of to Bower. Thornton was also to pay all costs. Barbara thought the judge made it rather clear that he was on Thornton's side.

Some people sitting close to Langrel shook hands with him; Bower moved benignly among his old soldiers; Thornton and Marshall conferred; and the spectators began to disperse. It was all over. Barbara went to Thornton and gave him her hand. Then she slipped out. She did not want him to offer to take the dark wet ride with her to Grassmere, and besides, she had to go at once to Lucia. She walked to the hotel, in a thin drizzle of rain that fell noiselessly against the wet pavement, and by its very ineffectiveness added to the dreariness of the day.

She was shown at once to Lucia's private reception-room. Lucia was standing with her back to the window, her hands nervously interlaced. She was wearing a black gown, and Barbara thought impatiently that her dress and manner looked rather too much as if she were posed for a part. Barbara went to her with outstretched hand.

"It's wicked!" she cried. "Stephen has to pay all that money. I shall always hate William Langrel!"

"He's guilty?" cried Lucia.

"That's what the verdict said," replied Barbara, a trifle coldly.

"Is—is he to go to prison?" asked Lucia.

"No," replied Barbara, annoyed that Lucia should know so little of the probabilities of the trial. "The ones who should go to prison are Cousin William and that old hypocrite of a Bower."

Lucia's look deplored violence of word. She gave the effect of one struggling to suppress emotion. She sat down and covered her eyes with her hands.

"I'd hoped against hope," Lucia said.

"What difference can the verdict make when you know Stephen is innocent?" Barbara asked. "He'll soon live

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

this down in the eyes of the world, and his friends know what he is."

"Oh, you don't understand," Lucia said. "I can't face this. It's the end."

"The end of what?" cried Barbara. "You can't mean—"

Lucia hesitated. She was far more reticent by nature than Barbara, but the gates of her reserve were shaken. "I'll tell you," she said, "for you are more my friend than any one here. I—I can't face anything like disgrace. I could help Stephen in everything but this."

Barbara waited.

"It isn't that I love him less because of this," Lucia went on, "but I am a coward. When I was a little girl my mother's father was tried for a felony. I can never forget what I suffered, child though I was, when he was fighting indictments and getting stays of proceedings, putting off his inevitable imprisonment. The other children said things to me—for children are often cruel; they don't know how facts hurt."

"But that was so long ago," murmured Barbara.

"That's not all," Lucia said, desperately; "I must tell you so that you won't judge me too hastily. My father, some years ago, was involved in some dubious transactions—I don't suppose it was his fault, but if they had come to light he would have been held responsible. For years and years he had to pay blackmail till his blackmailer died; for years I never knew from day to day that exposure would not come—"

She broke off and began to sob.

"I'm sorry," Barbara said in a constrained tone.

"I hate myself for being such a coward," Lucia went on. "But I can't help it. I had disgrace because of my grandfather; constantly I feared it with my father. I can't live side by side with a man who is under the stigma."

Barbara was thinking that if Leonard were under a cloud she would spend herself lifting it for him. She

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

would make his success, his happiness; she would make him indifferent to the world. Her glance was significant.

"You are not very merciful," Lucia said, with quivering lips. "It is because I'm not strong enough for the test. It's a question of failing Stephen now or failing him later. I know my own limitations. I know that however I might try to help him, I would be always weighted down by that old obsession, that old horror of being eternally companioned with disgrace. I have no choice." Had Lucia said no more than that she would have left Barbara sympathetic, if a little contemptuous. But she added, "One must try to be sensible."

"Oh, if you are going to use that word 'sensible,'" murmured Barbara.

"What is there so contemptible in trying to be sensible?" cried Lucia, with spirit. "You know nothing of the opposition I should have to meet from my father, from my married sister, from her husband who doesn't want me to marry any one, from all my relatives. You're a widow; you are singularly free, and you don't know the pressure that can be brought to bear on me!"

For a moment Barbara was diverted from the consideration of Thornton's further calamity by Lucia's assumption that she was free. No one, she thought, could be more bound than she was by her clinging love of Leonard.

"I'm not going to judge you," she said, gently. "I suppose you are doing the best you can. But this will be such a terrible added blow to poor Stephen."

"Oh, haven't I thought of that!" Lucia cried. "But I'll tell him fully. He knows something of my grandfather's imprisonment. Who doesn't know? I'll tell him about father. He shall know that it is cowardice, not lack of love, that makes me fail him."

That, Barbara reflected, would be small comfort. The reason for abandoning him hardly mattered.

"I'll go away," Lucia said, "so that he sha'n't be hurt

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

by seeing me. I'll make father take me back to California. You're a good friend to Stephen, and you'll be here. I have envied you the courage you had to go into that dreadful court—"

Barbara rose. "I must go; it's getting late, and my sister-in-law will be alarmed about me."

Lucia did not attempt to detain her. Barbara could see that already she regretted her explanation. Why should she care what an inconspicuous Southern widow thought of her motives? Barbara walked quickly to the livery-stable and mounted old Kirby. She had never before ridden home in the dark, but she was not afraid. She knew every foot of the road in the daylight; and the exercise of feeling her way along it in the dark and wet would take her mind from Thornton's troubles and her own. The blood was racing through her brain as she rode. She was still full of indignation against Lucia, against the miscarriage of justice, against the harsh ways of life. The dripping trees rose before her in sinister shapes, the hedges came forward and receded as if they were alive. Kirby's feet slipped on the muddy road, and when he forded a creek the swollen water made him stagger. Now and then a voice called drearily across a farm-yard, or a dog barked mournfully in the distance. The night was in key with Barbara's mood.

Kirby broke into a stumbling gallop as they turned into Grassmere. Young Thias took the horse with a subdued air, and a glance over his shoulder at Sissy in the doorway. Sissy came forward and spoke whisperingly:

"Is you wet, Miss Barbara? Miss Anita's done had a fit and we had to send for the doctor."

"Is she worse?" cried Barbara, sharply.

"Lordy! no, miss," replied Sissy, frankly; "she done fell into a temper because you warn't home yit. Then she just went on wid it, and Thias done thought it wouldn't hurt none to call Dr. Lewis, and mought please her."

"Oh!" said Barbara in a relieved tone.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"She's taking a little nap now, so you git on dry things and I'll put your supper on," Sissy said. "There's two letters come, Miss Barbara."

Barbara's heart leaped. One, she knew, must be from Hare. She took the letters from Sissy and went upstairs. The one from Hare she left till the last to read; the other was from Annie Bestor, brief, like all her correspondence.

DEAR GIRL [it ran],—I'm sorry there's scarlet fever in your school, but glad for your sake that they have closed up till after Christmas. Not that it will be a rest for you, if your sister-in-law is worse and your friend in trouble. I've troubles of my own. Two of my teachers are leaving in the middle of the term. In my school the engagement ring seems ubiquitous and fatal. I wish you'd take your sister-in-law in your arms and come along here to me, and tell your academy principal that she can seek for a new teacher after Christmas. I just glanced up from my desk to see Helen Farley and Dr. Hare driving by. They both look radiant this autumn. When we Californians take a vacation, we make the effects of it last, I can tell you. Write to me soon.

A. B.

Barbara's heart contracted. More than once Annie Bestor had mentioned Hare and Helen Farley together. Lingeringly she opened Hare's letter. It was even shorter than usual.

DEAR ONE [it ran],—It is Sunday night and I am just back from a climb up one of our local mountains. It has been a bright sunshiny day, with a tang of something like frost in the air. I was with some men, but I soon outdistanced them. It all brought back the high Sierras to me, and you, Barbara. I thought of you wistfully, and I could feel your hand in mine. I wished for you here, and making a part of my regular habits in Pasadena, my daily life. But it can't be, I suppose. I still mean to come at Christmas, or perhaps it will have to be some time in January, depending on some of my cases here. You will forgive a short letter, since I am so tired. Maybe I can write to you in the middle of the week.

LEONARD.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

Barbara took what comfort she could in the letter, though it was cold enough. At least, he said he wished she were there and he still meant to come to her near Christmas. How she wished she could take or leave Anita and accept Annie Bestor's half-jocular offer! But that was impossible. She must pin her hopes on Hare's coming visit. She had not quite finished her supper when Sissy told her that Anita was awake and asking for her. She found Anita propped up in bed, palsied and drawn in the harsh light of an unshaded lamp. Barbara started at the look in her face, and went forward hurriedly.

"Are you worse?" she said.

"No, I ain't worse, no thanks to you," snapped Anita.

"Let me put a shade on the lamp."

"I can't see if you do. Something's wrong with the lamp."

"What did the doctor say, sister Anita?" asked Barbara, anxiously.

"Never you mind what he said. You tell me about Stephen's case."

Stephen's case! For the moment Barbara had forgotten all about Thornton. Doubtless at the moment he was with Lucia, being hurt in love, much as Hare was hurting her. Only Lucia would not change, but Hare must. He must be once more what he had been in the mountains.

XVIII

FREEDOM ONCE MORE

ANITA lifted one shaking hand and pointed it uncertainly at Barbara.

"What are you a-waiting for?" she croaked. "Don't you suppose I know all about your goings-on? The academy's been shut for a week and you've been going to court to be stared at. You want to have people talking about you, don't you, my young woman?"

"People won't criticize the fact that I stood by your cousin, sister Anita," Barbara said.

"How long you going to keep me waiting till you tell me?" Anita shrilled.

"Stephen is ordered to pay the value of the bonds to Cousin William," Barbara answered, unwillingly.

"So another one of my kin is disgraced," Anita said, slowly.

"But you know he isn't guilty, sister Anita," Barbara protested.

"He's disgraced," went on Anita in a ruminating tone, "and Lucia Streeter will throw him over. Yes, I see your plan, Barbara, my girl."

"My plan!" cried Barbara.

"I understand why you've been a sympathizing visitor to the court while your pupils were mercifully sick of scarlet fever and the wife of the brother you killed dying here of neglect. You thought, didn't you, that you'd get Grassmere, after all!"

A slow red rose over Barbara's face. She forgot her

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

old resolution of silence, and she said: "You've been accusing me all along of wanting some one else."

"And don't you reckon I've seen that things have gone wrong between you and that upstart doctor?" Anita asked. "You can't hide from me what's in your mind."

"Let me beat up your pillows, sister Anita," Barbara said. "I wish you'd lie down."

"You've come back pretty late in the day to do me any service," Anita said. "But you can wait on me now. Go get on your riding-habit again."

"Do you want Dr. Lewis?" Barbara asked. "Maybe young 'Thias will go for him, and I'll stay here to take care of you."

"You'll go this errand yourself, and it's not for the doctor. You ride to Charlottesville and get Mr. Marshall. I'm going to change my will."

"That can wait till to-morrow, sister Anita," Barbara said, soothingly.

"I can see through you, miss. You think I'll change my mind by to-morrow!"

"Sister Anita, Mr. Marshall wouldn't stir out a night like this. The most he would do would be to come in the morning. Just rest, and I'll go to the nearest telephone and talk to him and tell him to come here as soon as he can."

"That won't do," Anita said, excitedly. "You go to him and tell him that a dying woman wants him to-night."

"You're not dying, sister Anita," Barbara said. "You're just tired out with your attack of this afternoon."

Anita's face worked. She lay back on the pillows with twitching, ineffective hands. Barbara hurried to the bedside and bent over her. Anita feebly pushed her away.

"You are trying to kill me," she gasped.

"I'll go, sister Anita," said Barbara.

"Is Grassmere mine to do what I like with?" whispered Anita.

"Yes."

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"Then he won't have it, and you won't have it. I'm going to leave it to my second cousin, Alison Peters."

Again Barbara's face flamed. Alison Peters was a brute and a drunkard who had driven his own children out of doors, and with whom no respectable people conorted. To leave Grassmere to him!

"Sister Anita," she pleaded, "my brother loved this place. You know he would rather I had it than any one else in the world, but, failing me, he'd want Stephen to have it. He wouldn't want that—that Peters carousing in the rooms where my father and mother led their lives."

"I might make you swear never to marry Stephen Thornton," whispered Anita. "But you'd lie to me. Wantons always lie. Anyhow, Stephen's disgraced."

"But no more than Peters."

Barbara spoke despairingly, convinced that she was dealing with a woman who was practically insane.

"I wish you'd send young 'Thias and let me stay with you," she said.

"You know 'Thias would never get past the graveyard," Anita retorted, contemptuously. "You do like I say. You swore to me that I owned you, body and soul, because of what you had cost me. Now you go!"

"Very well, sister Anita," Barbara said. "I'll go. I'll start as soon as I can get dressed."

Anita closed her eyes; her sallow face took on a dreadful pallor. Barbara chafed her hands and held salts to her nostrils. Anita pushed her away feebly.

"Sissy," she whispered.

Barbara called Sissy, and, going to the stables, she had one of the carriage-horses put to the light dog-cart. Then she drove down to Colonel Thornton's, the nearest house that had a telephone, meaning to send for Dr. Lewis. She was fortunate enough to find him there, playing bridge-whist. He came out to meet her, a little cylindrical man, long past his first youth and obviously past his first interest in his profession. She asked him about Anita's

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

afternoon attack, and he said that it had been sufficiently serious for him to order her to be kept perfectly quiet. Barbara described the condition in which she had found Anita, and the doctor suggested that they drive back at once to Grassmere. On the way Barbara cautioned him not to let Anita know that she was in the house.

He came down from Anita's room looking perturbed.

"She's worse," he said. "These fits of excitement simply shorten her life. She's been eating out her nerves ever since your brother died. I've given her a quieting dose, and I'll look in the first thing in the morning. But you send for me if there's a change. You ought to have some white man about the place to-night."

"Is it as bad as that?" Barbara asked.

"I don't reckon she's in immediate danger, but if any change should come you'd have to send for me, and you can't depend upon a nigger. It's too bad your sister won't have a telephone."

"I'll manage, somehow," Barbara said. "Is it safe to leave her with Sissy now? I have to go to Charlottesville."

"Go to Charlottesville? At this hour and in this weather?"

"It's imperative. I promised Mrs. Langworthy. It was my protesting against the errand, I'm afraid, that made her collapse. I can get some one in the village to go with me. In any case I'll have to take you back, you know."

Dr. Lewis capitulated, not wishing to be detained longer than he must from his bridge-whist. But as Barbara drove him the half-mile that separated him from his game he protested against the advanced ideas which had poisonously penetrated into Virginia, with the result that the fair flowers of the state were teaching school and doing a man's work, instead of being waited on by their own firesides. Barbara listened with a little smile; there was something half humorous and half pathetic in such talk,

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

coming as it often did from men unable to care for their superfluous women folk, and who, in self-respect, must believe that the advanced ideas were due to the independence of their womankind and not to their own inability as providers.

She left the doctor on the dry, warm porch of her neighbor's house, and turned back over the grinding gravel of the drive to the dark road. All her senses were alert. She was not afraid, but she was living at high speed, her mind racing sometimes to Anita with her sick, yellow face; sometimes to Hare, looking radiant by the side of Helen Farley; and sometimes to Thornton, defeated, possibly dishonored, and about to lose Grassmere. She had driven perhaps half a mile when she almost ran into a man walking toward her, head down, shoulders bowed. He swerved aside under the horse's head, and something in the blurred outline of his figure assured her that it was Thornton.

"Stephen," she called, "where are you going?"

He came to the side of the dog-cart and stared up at her. "Is it you, Barbara?" he asked, uncertainly. His tone was that of a man bewildered with sleep, unable to realize his surroundings. "I'm walking," Thornton said. "I had to walk."

Pityingly, Barbara comprehended. He had come instinctively to the red road that he knew so well, to the old places among which he had grown up.

"Get in here!" she said. "You're miles from where you have to sleep."

He mounted beside her, and she drove on, slowly, under the lashing rain. A sheaf of long lightning struck across the sky, and by its quick gleam she saw his set, wretched face.

"I've seen Lucia," he said.

"Oh, dear Stephen, I'm so sorry!" Barbara cried.

"Do you know," he said, in a surprised tone, "I don't greatly mind, really. I remember when I was studying

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

'King Lear,' long ago, I was struck by the line, 'For when the greater malady is fixed, the lesser is scarce felt.'"

Barbara felt sorry for Lucia. Thornton could not have loved her deeply if he put her so far below his career. He half answered what was in her mind, by continuing:

"It's not that I haven't cared for Lucia; and that I don't care for her still, but I'm not the same man she loved a few weeks ago. Then I was in the full tide of success, honored, with no limits to my ambition. Now I'm dishonored. I'm not beaten, mind you; I won't lie down. But I'm ended in my own state, the only place that has any meaning for me."

"No, you're not beaten, Stephen," she said. "You'll live this down, and you'll build up your career here, in the very place where you've been so badly used. There'll be plenty of people to help."

He gave a short laugh. "You don't understand, I'm afraid. Marshall gave me the hint this evening. The Bar Association means to disbar me."

"Oh, Stephen, it can't be!" she breathed.

"So I should have said two months ago. It can't be, but it is. My work as a lawyer is ended, here or anywhere else!"

The horse was moving slowly, drawing the dog-cart with 'difficulty through the heavy mud. The rain was coming down furiously and Barbara's hands were wet and cold. Here and there a light showed in a farm-house window. She checked the horse and turned in her seat to look at Thornton. He had lost everything—the chance to work at the career he had chosen, the woman he cared for, the esteem of the world which judges by appearances. But he should not lose everything. Barbara compressed her lips and took impulsively her resolution; he should not lose Grassmere before she made one more plea for him to Anita.

"Where are you going?" he asked, dully.

"Back to Grassmere. I was going on an errand for

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

Anita to Charlottesville, but I've thought of another way of managing. Come back with me Stephen, will you? I'm asking for my sake, and not yours. Anita is worse, and Dr. Lewis says there ought to be a white man in the house to-night."

"Yes," he assented; then he murmured, "Disbarred!"

Barbara was not the sort of person to take a woman's career seriously. To her, love and home and children made the future worth while; anything else was a stop-gap or a substitution. She had met, while in college, girls who did seem to put a career before any other future, and she had believed that they were either deceiving themselves or posing. But she knew that all that there is of a man must go into his work—his keenest mental efforts, his highest moments of idealism, his selfishnesses, his little-nesses; they all unite to form that curious mixture of good and bad which is the man himself and which can be read in the sum total of his achievement. She knew the completeness of Thornton's loss.

"Stephen," she said, "we're too close to it yet to tell what can be done. Maybe they will decide not to disbar you."

He shook his head at that. "Don't try to feed me on false hopes, Barbara. I'm not a baby, you know. I can stand up under all that will happen to me, including the cold shouldering of my old friends. The vital thing is that I've got no future."

"You have a future, Stephen. I can't see it yet; but I know a way can be worked out, and I'll help you; I'll stand by you as never friend stood by friend before. We'll see each other every day. I know I can be of use."

He found her chilled hand. "I know you can, too, Barbara. I believe that, instinctively, I was walking to you to-night. I've never forgotten that day when you said we could be good pals, and you've always helped. I'm not moaning for sympathy, but I can get along better

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

if I have your friendship, if I can be sure of seeing you every day, as you promise."

Barbara had forgotten all about Hare and her own forebodings and uncertainties. She was conscious of a tremendous exhilaration to which the wind and the rain were a fit setting. She had a keen sense of power, almost a conviction that with her own hands she could set right Thornton's crooked destiny. He should have Grassmere, and some day his innocence should be proved. She drove on slowly, for she wanted to arrive at Grassmere so that it should seem as if she had had time to go to Charlottesville and return. All the way back she talked exaltedly to Thornton, and her high mood modified somewhat the hopelessness which lay behind his stern assertion that he was not beaten.

When they reached Grassmere she led Thornton quietly into the house.

"I'm not going to let Anita know that you're here," she whispered. "She must not suspect that we are disquieted about her. I'll give you the down-stairs bedroom."

She left him in the library and mounted the stairs. At the top she met Sissy, her broad face frightened.

"Miss Anita say you-all come to her at once. She say she's done been listening to yo' horse a-goin' to Charlottesville."

"Mr. Thornton's here, but don't tell Miss Anita," Barbara cautioned. "The doctor said I must have some one."

They heard a step in the cold passage, and, looking up, they saw Anita feeling her way unsteadily toward them. Barbara ran toward her.

"Sister Anita! You mustn't! The doctor said—"

"What are you-all conspiring about?" croaked Anita.

"Get a hot-water bag, Sissy," Barbara directed.

"You go and get young 'Thias," Anita said. "Bring him to me."

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"Get 'Thias, if Miss Anita wants him," Barbara said.

She carried Anita to her bed and chafed her cold hands and feet.

"Let me alone," Anita said, fiercely. "Your touch sickens me. Did you go on Kirby, like I told you, to Charlottesville?"

"I couldn't take Kirby, sister Anita; he was too tired. I took the dog-cart and Mungo. I stopped on the way for Dr. Lewis."

Anita's hard gaze wavered. "I thought you were lying. I knew Kirby was in the stall. If you took the dog-cart, why didn't you bring back the lawyer?"

"He said it was of no use to come, sister Anita. He said he'd have to draw up the will—"

"How could he draw up the will," Anita said, "when he doesn't know how I'm going to make it?"

Barbara met her suspicious eyes calmly. "You know, sister Anita, that there's a lot in the first part of the will that goes in, no matter who you leave your property to—all that about directing that all your just debts be paid. Besides that, he said he didn't have any forms in either his house or office; that he'd have to get them from some other lawyer, and that he couldn't rout out any one else at that hour of the night and drag him down to his office. He said, too, that it would be pretty hard to get witnesses after midnight. He's coming in the morning."

"What time?"

"He didn't say, sister Anita, but I suppose as soon as he can. I told him the matter was urgent."

Sissy put her head in the doorway. "Here's 'Thias now, Miss Barbara."

"It wasn't Miss Barbara who sent for him, Sissy," Anita said. "It was me. I'm still the mistress in this house!"

"Come in, 'Thias," Barbara called. "Please don't try to sit up, sister Anita; the doctor said you mustn't."

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

Young 'Thias entered sheepishly, his toes turned in, a feeble smile on his face.

"'Thias, did Miss Barbara drive out with the dog-cart?"

Young 'Thias cast an embarrassed look at Barbara.

"You look at me," Anita said.

"Yes'm, she shore did have de dog-cart out," 'Thias said.

"What horse did she take?"

"She done take Mungo."

"What does the cart look like?"

"What do it look like?" repeated the negro in a bewildered tone.

"Yes; has it got mud on it, or hasn't it?"

"Law, Miss Anita, de mud is dat thick I'll sho have to take a rake handle to punch it out wid in de mawnin'. Cain't no li'l whittle stick do it."

"Go down-stairs," Anita said.

Young 'Thias moved to the door, Sissy behind him.

"Come back here, Sissy," Anita said; "you don't reckon I'm going to be left alone with Miss Barbara, do you?"

Barbara and Sissy took a seat on each side of the sick woman's bed. She lay silent, her unblinking eyes fastened on the ceiling. After a long time her eyes closed and she slept.

"Go, Sissy," Barbara said, "and get the down-stairs bedroom ready for Mr. Thornton. Then try to sleep. If I need you I'll ring the big breakfast-bell. You can put it outside the door."

When Sissy had gone Barbara looked at her watch. It was almost midnight. She got into a loose gown, prepared Anita's medicines, and settled herself for a long vigil. One step at a time, she told herself, was all she could take, but she must prepare some plausible story for the lawyer's non-appearance in the morning. She felt a keener sympathy for Anita, so pitifully at her mercy. Her

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

exalted mood had died and her conscience began to mock. All she had meant was to force Anita to take time to consider before she made a new will. Yet, after all, Grassmere belonged to Anita. She had a right to leave it to whom she pleased. There was no legal reason why Thornton should have it. Who was she to take justice into her own hands? She looked up, her face distressed, to find Anita's eyes upon her.

"There's a stranger in this house," Anita said. "Who have you brought into my house?"

"Nobody, sister Anita," Barbara said, soothingly. "Drink this."

Anita pushed away the medicine. "Who is the man down-stairs?" she asked.

Barbara was startled at her clairvoyance. "There's nobody. The doctor said you must take your medicine."

"Let Sissy give it to me."

"Sissy is asleep, sister Anita," Barbara said, gently. "She'll have to take care of you in the morning, you know. Shall I call her?"

"I can rest without the medicine," said Anita, and again she slept.

Barbara sat rigidly in her chair, her brow knitted, again considering her passionate advocacy of the right of Grassmere to a decent owner. She had no right in it herself, except one of habit and sentiment.

"It isn't as if I expected to gain anything by it," she cried, aloud, to her conscience.

She went over and over the grounds of her conduct. Sympathy for Thornton had carried her off her feet, carried her to the limit of coercing a sick woman, even of committing a crime. The same thoughts whirled through her head again and again, first violently, then slowly and dimly, and at last she slept. She woke with a start; a gray light was struggling through the window, and from the bed Anita was staring at her harshly, accusingly, Barbara went to her.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"Do you want anything, sister Anita?"

"You've lied to me," Anita said. "I know it now. You never went to Charlottesville."

"You don't know what you're saying, sister Anita. It's time for your medicine."

Barbara prepared a fresh drink and carried it to Anita. She lifted the inert little figure against the pillows. Anita thrust away the glass.

"Liar! oh, liar!" she cried.

Her eyes contracted and stared, foam came upon her lips, and she fell to one side, rigid, unconscious. Barbara laid her upon the pillows and then ran down-stairs, calling to Thornton. He was at the door when she reached it.

"It's Anita!" she gasped. "The doctor! Go for Dr. Lewis. Saddle Kirby yourself, and go."

She ran toward the servants' quarters and, calling Sissy, ordered her to bring hot water and flannels. Then she hurried back to Anita. She wrung her hands over that unconscious figure. Oh, if she had only gone for Marshall; then her skirts would have been clear.

She heard Kirby's hoof-beats sounding down the drive. Sissy came lumbering up the stairs with hot water. The two applied the remedies, but Anita's eyes remained closed and her breathing came uncertainly. Sissy went down-stairs for hartshorn while Barbara worked feverishly to revive the sick woman. The minutes dragged by; the gray light changed to rose, and day came. At last came again the sound of hoof-beats. Then Thornton entered.

"The doctor is coming as quickly as he can; I should think he'd be here in ten minutes. Can I do anything?"

"No; go down and see that Sissy gives you some breakfast. Nothing can be done till Dr. Lewis gets here."

"I'll send Sissy up with some coffee for you," Thornton said.

When he had gone Barbara returned to her seat by the bed. Slow tears rose in her eyes and fell heavily upon her cheeks. She could not remember when she had wept

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

before; and not so long ago she had said that she could never weep again. For the first time she saw fully the pathos of her sister-in-law's embittered life, knew the anguish that she must have suffered at losing her husband.

"Oh," cried Barbara in self-abasement, "I thought I was admirable enough to have given her the promise of my life to be at her bidding, and to have endured in silence all she said. But I've been ready, ever since the summer, to break that promise, to seize my own happiness. I haven't faced it before, but that's what I meant all the time—somehow to have my own happiness. And when she was helpless, quite in my power, I was all but ready to make her leave her property where she didn't want to."

The sun filtered in through the half-drawn blinds and touched Anita's face. Barbara went to the window to adjust them. When she turned back Anita was looking at her.

"Call Gilbert. Is Gilbert here?" Anita whispered.

"No, dear," Barbara said, her tears again rising.

"Oh yes, I forgot," Anita said, wearily. "I reckon I've been right sick."

"You'll be better soon," Barbara said.

"I sent you for Mr. Marshall. Is he here yet?"

"I'll go and telephone to him now to come," Barbara said.

"Don't leave me. Let some one else go."

Anita's voice was gentle. Barbara went into the hall. Thornton was coming up the stairs with a cup of coffee for her. She took it and said, brokenly:

"Please go and telephone for Mr. Marshall. Sister Anita wants him at once to change her will. Tell him what it's for, and how sick she is."

She went back to Anita, mechanically drinking the coffee as she walked. Then she set the coffee outside the door lest Anita might reproach her for considering her own comfort. But she need not have feared. Anita was looking at her without enmity.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"I reckon I'm mighty sick," she said.

"The doctor's coming; I can hear the wheels on the drive now," Barbara said. "You'll be better soon."

"What were you crying about, Barbara?" Anita asked.

"Oh, I reckon I was thinking that your life's been so hard and that I might have been kinder," Barbara said, mournfully.

Anita was silent for a moment. Then she said: "I'll tell you now, Barbara. I never meant to leave Grassmere either to Stephen or to Alison Peters. I meant at the end to leave it to you. I couldn't face Gilbert otherwise. I reckon if there was no hereafter," she added, honestly, "that I'd see you didn't get it, for I certainly don't like you. But I hope to meet Gilbert, and maybe if I've given you Grassmere he—well—" she ended weakly.

Barbara turned her back upon Anita and opened the door for the doctor. The irony of her situation seemed more than she could bear. The little man entered and went to the bed. Barbara knew by the sudden straightening of his spine that he was alarmed at Anita's condition. He made a brief examination, and then Barbara saw him taking out his hypodermic syringe. Anita closed her eyes, and the doctor said to Barbara, gravely:

"You'd better get that nurse Mrs. Langrel had. I saw her in the village as I drove by."

"Is there—danger?" whispered Barbara.

"She's a mighty sick woman, Miss Barbara. You certainly ought to have a telephone in this house."

"When you've done all you can for her you must have breakfast," Barbara said, with mechanical hospitality.

She sat down again beside her sister-in-law, her hands trembling, her brain numb. Sissy came in with a tray of food for her, but she could not eat. She heard the sound of a dog-cart on the drive, and guessed that Thornton had gone for the nurse. The doctor came in and took the chair opposite her. His look of professional

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

gravity did not mollify the expression he conveyed of having completely satisfied his appetite. He laid his watch upon the table, and Barbara's mind mechanically ticked off the seconds until the noise seemed unbearably loud. The dog-cart came back, and soon the nurse entered, already in her uniform, and already with the air of taking possession of the sick-room. Once or twice Anita opened her eyes and smiled.

Toward noon Marshall arrived. Barbara asked Dr. Lewis to speak to him. She would let things take their course; no decision concerning Anita should she ever again hold in her own hands. If Hare came—if he asked her to go to California with him, Anita should decide. The doctor returned and said that Marshall would stay to dinner. That meant, she took it, that Anita would probably be stronger. Sissy announced the meal, and Barbara went down to serve the three men. Marshall remarked that he had been out of town all night and had returned not five minutes before Thornton had telephoned to him. Barbara gave a sigh of relief at this. Even if she had gone to Charlottesville the night before she would not have found him. Afterward, the men went with their cigars into Gilbert's old smoking-room, and she returned to Anita.

The nurse was bending over Anita. As Barbara approached the bed Anita opened her eyes and said, in a clear, full tone, "Babbie, I can see Gilbert."

"Call the doctor, Mrs. Rhodes," cried the nurse.

Barbara ran from the room, calling at the top of her voice, because instinctively she knew that nothing she did could ever again irritate Anita, that no sound would ever alarm those still ears. The doctor ran up-stairs, and as she watched him she noticed that he set his feet sideways like a duck. She stared after him; then she knew that some one was taking her down-stairs. She looked into Thornton's face and heard herself saying, "Is that three people whose deaths are due to me?"

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

She found herself in the library, Thornton holding her hands. They both waited, their ears keen for any sound from up-stairs. The door swung open and Dr. Lewis came in, somehow with the effect of baring his head.

"It's all over," he said.

Barbara moved away from Thornton and, sitting down at Gilbert's desk, leaned her head on her hands. For a few moments she continued to be dazed with the shock of her sister-in-law's death. Then her mind suddenly cleared. Her first feeling was one of immense thankfulness that Anita's will had not been changed, that Thornton was still to have Grassmere. She had been guilty, in effect, of robbing Anita of her own property; nothing but the accident of the lawyer's absence and of Anita's real intention saved her.

Then Barbara found herself opening Gilbert's desk and writing. She put down Annie Bestor's name and address and ten words: "If you are serious, I accept offer. Telegraph. Letter follows." She glanced up. The doctor had gone and Thornton was standing at the table, looking gravely at her. Barbara gasped; she had realized that she was free, and she had chosen what she would do with her freedom. All her fine offers to help Thornton had come to nothing. She was going to Hare, to stand the test of making herself a part of his daily life, to win him back.

"Stephen," she said, unsteadily, "you'll have to be driving to the village directly to—to attend to things. I want you to send this telegram. Read it."

He took it from her and read, making no comment.

"I've got to go," Barbara said. "Anita has left you Grassmere, as Miss Streeter has probably told you—"

"Anita left me Grassmere! Lucia told me!" he exclaimed. "What do you mean?"

"Didn't she tell you? Didn't you know?"

"But no! But of course I won't take Grassmere—"

"You must! It's my expiation. I will tell you why

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

presently. You must stay here; you must finish your work in medical school, and practise here. Build over in that way, Stephen."

A grave, speculative look crossed Thornton's face. "I never thought of that," he said, slowly.

"Think of it now," Barbara said. "Think of it, and forget how I'm failing you. Stephen, I've got to go! I'm desperate!"

"I know," he said, gently. "I understand, Barbara. You're not failing me. People have to do what they have to do. We'll talk of Grassmere later."

"I'm wrong to go," she said, desperately. "Stephen, something tells me— Oh, but I can't explain. You wouldn't understand. Only I'm committed. I've started on a certain course, and I've got to see it through. It would be like pushing a horse off the track before he was in sight of the winning-post. It's the first time I've been free. Anita's dead. I—I can't stay now. I've got to go."

She was holding out her shaking hands toward him, her face white and her eyes lack-luster.

"I'll send the telegram at once," Thornton said in a grave tone. "Perhaps it is not the time to talk of what is wise or right. Do what you must, and remember that you haven't failed me—you couldn't fail me any more than I could fail you."

XIX

INTIMATIONS

THE train was within a few miles of Los Angeles, carrying Barbara to her lover, and, she believed, to happiness. She had written him a brief letter telling him of her sister-in-law's death and of Annie Bestor's offer of a position which she was accepting, among other reasons, because she must get away from all old associations. She had asked him to meet her at some point outside the city. She thought he would probably choose the second station out, but she was looking for him when she had still a hundred miles to travel. Yet every time the train drew to a stop she resolutely picked up a magazine so that she might not seem to be waiting for him. Thus it was that when she heard his footsteps in the aisle she did not turn. It was only when he sat down beside her that she looked up. In a flash she saw his handsome, welcoming face; then, impulsively, he kissed her.

"Oh, are you glad?" she whispered.

"Yes, dear; and so sorry for all you have been through."

"It doesn't matter now. And I couldn't wish to have poor Anita back."

Barbara spoke with a sense of great peace. She realized that her belief that she was going to him for her happiness and his had been reinforced by a determination to fight, if necessary, for that happiness. Now, she thought, there would be no need of a struggle.

"Your letter was very short," he said.

"Oh, I was so busy," she replied.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

It struck her that even the shortest of all her letters was longer than any he had ever written her. But she pushed aside that criticism and began to tell him the details of Anita's last illness and death.

"I suppose Miss Bestor will meet you?" he said when they were drawing into Los Angeles.

"No; she expects me on a later train. I wanted a few hours in which to consider where I was going to live."

"I was pretty sure you wouldn't make any effort to live in her house," Hare said, smiling.

"With a regiment of romantic girls watching you come and go?" she replied, her eyes lowered. "Besides, Miss Bestor told me that the history-teacher whose place I am taking lived outside, and that there is no room for me in the house."

"You knew I'd see after that, didn't you?" Hare said. "I've a list of possibilities, and I've been selfish enough to choose those to which I could get most easily from Pasadena. We'll look them over."

It was good to be taken care of again, Barbara thought, as she followed him through the railway station and into a cab. They spent an hour making a selection, settling at last upon a place which Hare said had been prepared by Providence. It was a suite of two rooms on the second floor of a house originally divided into apartments. While it had the ordinary indoor approaches, it could be reached from without by a flight of stairs at the side of the house, opening upon a little porch which in turn led to the sitting-room. The other suite on the floor was occupied by two young women who taught in a night-school. The landlady, a kindly-looking woman, was rather deaf.

"It couldn't be improved upon," Barbara agreed.

Hare did not stay. "Better not," he said. "I'll go now and have your trunk sent over. I'll come to-morrow evening. Meanwhile, you rest and unpack and make the place look like—ours."

Their eyes met softly. He shook hands and followed

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

the landlady, who was lingering on the stairs. Barbara, her face tender, went into the little bedroom and unpacked her bag. An hour later, refreshed and rested, she took her way to Annie Bestor's school. It was a long stucco building, well designed, and set in the midst of beautifully laid-out grounds. Yet to Barbara, used to the flavor of traditional studiousness carried in the atmosphere of the old red-brick academy in Charlottesville, this building seemed designed for play rather than for work.

She was shown at once into Annie Bestor's study.

"But what does this mean, my dear?" said Annie Bestor, kissing her. "I was just about to go and meet you."

"I know," Barbara replied, "but when I found I could get off earlier I decided to come straight ahead, settle in my rooms, and then appear demurely at your school like any other teacher."

Annie Bestor frowned slightly. "But, my dear, of course I meant to see about rooms for you. Already I've spoken to two or three friends."

"I'm so sorry," Barbara said. "I ought to have written to you not to take any trouble for me."

"Well, now you're here, you'll stay to dinner and meet the house teachers and look the girls over."

Annie Bestor's manner was not quite what it had been in the mountains. She was still cheery and outgoing, but a little of her holiday spirit had departed and was superseded by a workaday air. Her tone was a trifle more authoritative. Barbara was still her dear friend, but she was also her paid teacher.

"I don't want to hurry you," she said, "and I do so appreciate your coming so quickly. But if you could begin to teach to-morrow, it would be a godsend to me. We've been holding tests in history for two days, since the other woman's been gone. She wouldn't wait for you, because she said she had so much shopping to do for her

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

trousseau. I'm the least bit tired of having people use my school as a stop-gap until they can get married."

Barbara answered that she could begin work at once. But Annie Bestor's words made her feel rather guilty. For what was she herself doing but using the school as a means to matrimony? She reflected that the human tendency to make for any port in a storm sometimes worked hardship to the port.

Though the next few hours were very full of pedagogical matters, they went slowly. But at last the time was at hand when Hare would come. Every step in the street set her heart beating. When she heard him ascending the flight of stairs outside the balcony her senses swam. She threw wide the door and stood with arms outstretched. Hare caught her to him in a close embrace.

"It's been a long day, dear," he whispered.

"Oh," cried Barbara, half laughing, half weeping, "do you love me ath well ath you did yesterday?"

"Better, sweetheart," he said.

They sat down, hands clasped, and Hare looked about the little, welcoming room.

"Is it home?" she asked, yearningly.

"It's very sweet," he replied.

Barbara felt dashed. Why did he not call her rooms home? Ah, well, he should some time.

"Tell me about your day," she said. "Tell me about your mother. Does she know I'm here?"

"Yes," he replied, hesitatingly.

"I'll go to see her," Barbara said, quickly. "I couldn't expect her to come here."

"She'll be glad to see you," he said, mechanically. Then he added in a different tone: "I've told Mrs. Farley you're coming, and she's going to call in a day or two. She wants you for dinner on Sunday, so I warn you now to keep the day open. She'll ask me, too."

"I'd like to go, especially if you are to be there," Barbara said. "I want to meet her husband and children."

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"Farley's a fine man," Hare responded.

The conversation was in danger of sailing away from himself and herself. Barbara raised his hand to her cheek and leaned against it with a charming gesture.

"Are you truly, truly glad to see me, Leonard?" she murmured, wooingly.

"It's been a great help to have you come, Barbara," he replied, gravely. "I feel better since yesterday. But there is something I must tell you."

Her heart contracted, but she faced him with a brave smile. "What is it?"

"What ever the future brings to us, and I have hopes still that it will bring us each other—yet I know that I shall never be one of the great lovers."

Barbara was silent, relieved, and yet chilled.

"It's not in me, Barbara. I seem to be different from other men, made on a colder, more business-like plan, liking a kind of prosaic perfection, without much emotion in it, wanting the commonplaces of life to be carried through calmly, charmingly—a creature of habit—"

It was unfortunate for Barbara that she had the idea of pursuit so thoroughly interwoven with her consciousness. She had not had sufficient experience of life to know that a sincere passivity in all emotional matters is a woman's surest safeguard. In letting herself love Hare before she was certain he loved her she had laid herself open to an emotional risk, bound to engender other dangers of feeling. With a pitiable unconscious egotism she had opposed a world-old chapter in the reading of man's nature. She said what, to make for her safety, Hare should have said:

"Leonard, you shall have the habit of me. If—if it comes out the way we want it to, we'll each love as well as we can, and never wonder which is doing the more loving."

"You're very brave, Barbara," he said, touched, and he kissed her hand softly.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"But—in the mountains you seemed to have so much fervor," she said, after a pause.

"Yes," he told her; "the Sierras always have stimulated me, raised me to the *n*th power, given me an enthusiasm not my own. I think I told you something like that before."

Barbara was struggling in the chill of disappointment. "Your first letters were very—ardent," she returned.

"Yes, for I still felt the spell of your nearness. But pretty soon I dropped into my old habits, saw my old friends. You didn't seem to be part of it except on the days your letter came, and the day after."

For a moment Barbara's pride came to her rescue and she was minded to say to him coldly that they had better consider their experiment concluded. But her heart betrayed her. She did not even ask him if he thought it was useless to go on, but she said, trying to speak in a practical tone:

"My dear, your letters were all they should have been till you had that operation. Then they were different, and I'm sure it's because your physical energy became depleted—and I wasn't here to take care of you."

He shook his head.

"You'll feel differently when you've been with me for a while," Barbara went on, cheerfully. Then she leaned toward him with an adorable gesture. "Dear," she added, "what you and I want is so sweet, so rare, such a chance for us both, that I don't think we ought to give up the hope of it. We ought to take advantage of our opportunity to lure it to us. You have told me to trust the future. Won't you trust it, too? Put your hands in mine and say, 'Dear, I love you, and have faith to love you more.'"

Hare touched her hands reverently with his lips. "Oh, Barbara," he said, "you are so good, so generous. Dear little one, I love you, and have faith to love you more."

He said "dear little one" and not "dear little love,"

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

but it was better than "dear." Barbara lifted shining, courageous eyes to his.

"Not my hands," she said. "My lips."

Hare caught her to him.

"It must come right," he cried, kissing her tenderly.

She felt his kisses grow ardent; she closed her eyes and sank, sighing, against his shoulder.

The next afternoon, when Barbara returned from her school she found Helen Farley waiting for her in the little sitting-room. For a moment Barbara had a fleeting sense of having been intruded upon. She had the impression that Helen had been waiting for some time and had been keenly appraising this little room which already carried its atmosphere, already showed Barbara Rhodes more intimately to the caller than any of Barbara's words had ever done.

"How do you do, Mrs. Rhodes?" Helen said in her sweet, monotonous voice. "I asked to be allowed to wait down-stairs, but it seems your landlady has callers of her own, and so I was shown up here perforce."

"I am glad to see you," Barbara said. "It's nice of you to come all the way from Pasadena so soon."

"But we're going to be great friends," Helen told her; "so why not begin at once? Somehow I had a feeling that you'd come back here; I suppose because Miss Bestor was so anxious to have you in her school. She generally gets her own way."

"It's a delightful school," Barbara said; "and I'm glad I came."

She wondered if she and Helen would always talk meaningless surface phrases and would always give each other the impression of a determination never to let down the guard. Helen offered conventional condolences about Anita's death, to which Barbara suitably responded. Then she led the talk to Helen's children.

"Oh, they are dears," Helen said, her low voice rising in cadence; "a boy and three girls. The boy looks like

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

his father, but he's got my temperament, which isn't of the least use to a boy. The little girls look like me, but they've got their father's temperament, which is far more suitable to a boy than to girls. They're fearfully lively, and I still have a nurse. They go to school in the morning, but they keep her rushing every afternoon except Wednesday, when they attend the dancing-academy. That's my one day of peace—Wednesday. I look forward to it all week."

Barbara was sympathetic and interested. Helen seemed really happy in talking about her children, and Barbara wanted to believe her a happy woman. When Helen rose she gave the invitation for Sunday, which Barbara accepted.

"We really must be friends," Helen said, at the head of the stairs. "Telephone me sometimes, will you not?"

"I'll be glad to," Barbara responded. "I've a free hour, between twelve and twelve-thirty—"

"Oh, not then," interrupted Helen, quickly; "that's my one busy hour."

"Some other time, then," Barbara said.

The next day, when Barbara and Annie Bestor were having a cup of tea together at the close of the school day, Barbara mentioned that Helen had called upon her.

"Evidently she's tremendously interested in you," said Annie Bestor, with a cryptic smile, "or she'd never have given up her Thursday afternoon."

"What happens on Thursday?" Barbara asked.

"She and Dr. Hare play tennis on Tuesdays and Thursdays at the club; I believe two other people play with them. At any rate, you'd suppose, to hear them talk about it, that their game was some sacred rite that could not possibly be omitted without injuring their physical and spiritual health."

"Leonard has always said that he was a creature of habit," Barbara remarked.

"Yes, I think he is," agreed Annie Bestor. "He is a

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

man with a wide circle of acquaintances, but just a few friends whom he sees over and over again. I dare say one gets more out of life from such an arrangement, and Leonard Hare has always struck me as getting the most possible out of life, and taking the fewest possible chances."

Barbara went back to her rooms rather depressed. It was true that Hare in general took few chances. That reflection ought to mean, then, that in this emotional experiment of theirs he was scarcely taking a chance; he was playing for something—that was almost a certainty. Yet she saw more clearly than ever that if it turned out badly Hare would still have the resource of his intimate little circle and his work. Ah, if any one paid, she knew which one it would be. Over her solitary dinner she tried to shake off her depression. When they had parted had they not been as lover-like as any woman could wish? Had not the old mood of the mountains returned? And was he not coming back that evening? Surely all would be well. Yet she remembered with an unreasonable discontent that biweekly tennis game.

"Can it be," she thought, uncomfortably, "that I'm only going to be happy when I'm with him, and that these miserable doubts will rise whenever we are parted? Oh, if it were only the beginning of the summer again!"

But what she meant by that wish she did not ask herself. After dinner she put on a white gown, and the blue beads he liked, and waited for him with pensive face. Yet when she heard his step on the stairs happiness sprang into her heart and a myriad of torches glowed behind her eyes.

"I'm afraid I'm very early," he said; "but I couldn't help that."

"That's one thing you need never avoid," she replied in a tone that was almost a carol; "you could never come too early."

"Had any other callers since I was here?" he asked. "And may I smoke?"

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"Oh, do," she said; "it's so delightfully domestic."

She remembered that in the mountains he had never wanted to smoke. But then those were lover days, and these were to be more like marriage days, when habits were formed and compromises arranged.

"Yes; Mrs. Farley was here yesterday," she said. "Evidently she told you."

"She telephoned me. I haven't seen her since Wednesday."

"She's awfully nice," Barbara remarked. She nestled beside him, and ventured a question.

"How often do you see her in the week, Leonard?"

He hesitated for a moment; she knew he was reticent, but then, between them there should not be reticences. He conquered his brief reluctance and replied:

"Generally twice a week—Wednesday afternoons, and pretty nearly all day Sunday."

Barbara was silent. Evidently he did not count the Tuesday and Thursday tennis games, because then he was not alone with her. Sundays he probably saw as much of her husband and children as he did of her, but Wednesday he was alone with her, for that was the day her children were out of the way, the day she had said she looked forward to. Four times a week seemed very often to Barbara; Hare did not appear to be planning to come to her oftener than that.

"I see her in between times, too," Hare went on in a precise voice, "for we know the same group of people and do the same things. But I call at the house only twice a week."

"She's worth it," Barbara said.

"But I don't think," he went on, "that I'll be able to spend my full Sundays there after this."

Barbara smiled at him. "Do you know," she said, "that I nearly called you up during my free hour yesterday, between twelve and half past—"

"That's a bad time to telephone me," he said, abruptly.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

Barbara recalled acutely that Helen Farley had interrupted her in the same hasty manner to say that she was not free at that hour. Did they telephone to each other every day? And, to face the question at last, did Helen love him, or was she merely one of the married women interested in masculine society and pleased with the particular admiration of some attractive bachelor? She remembered that Annie Bestor had said that Helen and her husband had not one idea in common.

"After all, I'd nothing to say that I can't say now," she murmured.

The dinner at the Farleys' was not an experience Barbara entirely enjoyed. She liked their beautiful house, of redwood weathered to a soft shade, and she was interested in seeing that Helen's exquisite drawing-room had been designed not for itself, but as a background for its mistress. Farley was quite what Annie Bestor had led her to expect, a man of mingled commonplaceness and power. His commonplaceness lay in the fact that his personality was without charm, and that his ideas were conventional and unilluminated; his implication of power lay in the fact that he was the head of a large business corporation which made money. He had seen a public need and had exploited it along well-worn lines. Barbara realized that he could give his wife only money, but she asked herself, a bit cynically, where Helen Farley's charm would be without that money.

The children were good-looking and well-mannered. Altogether it was a delightful family, and they showed Barbara true Californian hospitality. At first she felt free of spirit—but as the dinner progressed that sense of restraint came over her which she had learned to recognize as the precursor of jealousy. It seemed to her that Hare was taking as much pains to call her "Barbara" as he was to call Helen "Mrs. Farley." She did not like that. His tie with her was closer, of course, but Farley and his wife were not supposed

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

to know that. Was not her Christian name being used to convince Farley?

"Oh, this will never do," she told herself. "We'll never get on if I'm going to be jealous."

Even after they took their leave and Barbara had Hare to herself she was vaguely disquieted by the trend of their conversation. She said to him that, beautiful as the Farley house was, she did not like it so well as she did Grassmere.

"Nor I," he said. "I have always liked Grassmere better than any other house I've ever seen. If all goes well with us, when we're old, let us go back there."

"Oh, if we could!" she said. "Perhaps Stephen will sell it to us."

She felt his arm stiffen. "You— What did you say, Barbara?" he asked.

"Is it possible you haven't understood that Anita left Grassmere to Stephen?" she cried.

"You didn't tell me," he said, quietly. "I'm sorry you are to lose it."

"Oh, my dear, if the stars come back to us, what does it matter?" she whispered.

"It doesn't, of course, to me. But that place should have been yours. It is an effort to separate Grassmere from you."

Something in his tone vaguely disturbed her. But then, she reminded herself, she had been upset all afternoon. She began to talk of Thornton and his lawsuit, ashamed that she had forgotten to speak of him, in her absorption in her own affairs. She dwelt indignantly on the fact that Lucia Streeter had jilted him.

"So that's why she's coming back," Hare said. "I wondered. I thought she'd make her father stay there till the marriage. I had a note from her to-day."

When Hare had taken Barbara to her balcony he refused to come in.

"I can't, dear; it's nearly ten o'clock and I've a heavy day before me. I'll come to-morrow night."

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"Good night, dearest," she sighed.

"Good night, dear little one; I love you, and have faith to love you more."

During the next few weeks Barbara knew more pain than joy. There were times when Hare was all that even her exacting heart could ask, but there were more hours when she felt that his critical mind held dominion over his heart. He was not making the progress in love that she expected. She tried to absorb herself in her school work, and she wrote long letters to Thornton, wanting, so far as she could, to atone for what she considered her desertion of him. He wrote that he had paid his false debt to Langrel, was living in Grassmere until she should want it, for he meant it to be hers; and he was reading hard at his medical text-books. He had made arrangements to go back to medical school, when his reviewing was done, and graduate with the current class.

One day, after Christmas, she called on Hare's mother. Mrs. Hare kept her waiting for a little while in the drawing-room, which Barbara felt had been furnished according to Helen Farley's taste. Mrs. Hare came in with her usual little fluttering cough, her listening eyes, and her air of having her hand at her mouth in frightened fashion. Barbara went toward her with a protecting rush of pity. This was still the sad, alarmed little creature who had fought all her life to save to respectability the husband whom she loved and of whom she was ashamed.

"I beg your pardon," Barbara cried, taking Mrs. Hare's hands in hers. "I was so preoccupied in looking at this attractive room that I didn't hear you come in. It's very charming. Don't you think so?"

"It's mighty pretty," Mrs. Hare said. "I'm used to it now, but at first I missed my own things. Sit down again, Miss Barbara. It certainly is good of you to come and see an old woman like me."

Mrs. Hare's manner was rather that of a social inferior addressing a lady bountiful. The time was when Barbara

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

had unquestioningly accepted the attitude, but now it embarrassed her and she did her best to change it. She saw that talking about the old places and people in Albemarle County only intensified it, and she led the talk to Hare and his achievements. At first Mrs. Hare acted as if Barbara was conferring a favor on her son by noticing that he had risen in the world. But Barbara would have none of that.

"I'm so proud to be his friend," she said. "No young man in Albemarle County has accomplished what he has. And he is so modest about it all."

She said more of the same sort of thing, until Mrs. Hare forgot herself in her pride in her son. She topped all Barbara's praises.

"He's so good to me," she said, humbly; "he ain't never going to be ashamed of his old mother. There was a time, Miss Barbara, when I was mighty feared of that. It would have been natural enough, considering how far he has gone beyond me."

"It would never be natural for him," Barbara replied, warmly. "He is as proud of you as he has every reason to be."

"Oh, I ain't nothing," the mother replied. "All I've ever done was to work's hard as I could for him, and now he works hard for me."

Ah no, he worked hard for himself, and allowed her to share in the results; Barbara knew that there was no comparison in the service of the two.

"I never was at ease about it," Mrs. Hare went on, "till I came here. I never could seem to believe that all his kind friends would be kind to me, too. Now and then, before I came out, Mrs. Farley used to send me little things, but I always thought he got her to do it. I was always expecting his fine friends would get him away from me. It just seemed to me that when he'd left home I'd lost him."

"But you know that you never can," Barbara murmured.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

Mrs. Hare was launched on the full tide of emotional reminiscence.

"Then I was always afraid he'd marry some girl that would take him away. Leonard never was one to confide, but he'd sometimes tell me his plans. I tried to think I wanted him to fall in love for his own happiness, but all the time I was feared that when he did I'd lose him. The time he told me he was going to ask that rich girl to marry him I had to live on my knees to get the strength to bear it. I reckon it was wrong in me, but I was glad when she refused him. 'Tain't wise for a man raised poor to marry a rich girl."

Barbara's heart grew cold and heavy. Her chill seemed to have communicated itself to Mrs. Hare, who started and looked guilty.

"I reckon I've run on too much," she said, hastily. "But you are from home, and talking to you this afternoon seemed like talking to myself, Miss Barbara."

"I like to hear about Leonard," Barbara said, lamely.

XX

TWILIGHT

ONCE outside the house, Barbara walked almost violently, sick with distaste and anger. She felt a physical repugnance toward Hare's staring white house and flaunting blue shrubs. The bungalows she passed seemed too keen in definition, too strong in color. The sun was too bright. It was as if there was too much substance in all she saw.

She reflected that when she had entered into her relation with Hare she had, indeed, concealed from him her love, but the fact that she loved him had nothing like the bearing on their situation that the fact had which he had concealed from her. For he had deceived her; his conscience had been vassal to his desire. He had let her think he had never really loved any girl, never asked any one to marry him. She had questioned him, in the mountains, about his life in Pasadena, and she realized now that he had not given her a fair account, that he had answered her in a way so general as to be essentially false.

Yet all her anger did not kill her love for him. As she walked homeward she confessed to herself, miserably, that she still wanted him, still longed for his love. Only, she wanted to trust him, too; she hoped for an explanation that would somehow square his conduct with her own sense of fair dealing. Otherwise, the whole summer would mean, not an idyl, but an episode—an episode for which she would pay. If he had deceived her intentionally he was not the man she thought him, and if he was not

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

the man she thought him, the future together on which she felt she must build would be on a lower level than she had expected.

Barbara felt a wild impulse to accuse Hare, to reproach him. Yet she knew that she must not use such tactics unless she were prepared to lose him. Almost she hated herself for loving him, for being unable to give him up. She had all the feeling of an outraged wife, and none of her rights. Hare was free and she was bound, and her pride was not strong enough to force her into freedom, too, no matter what the price. All the veils with which she had been trying to blind her mind were torn away. The fiction that they were each trying to win their wonderful future must be pitifully transparent to him. It was she who was trying, and Hare who was passive. He knew her defenselessness. She had got herself into a situation where she was playing the man's part of pursuit; and when, to a woman whose affections were engaged, had that ever been anything but a losing game?

When it came time for Hare to appear Barbara had resolved only upon one thing—that she must meet him with good nature and charm. She wanted an explanation, but she wanted more a tender mood in him. He was later and later each evening now. She stood at the window for half an hour, to see him pass under the street lamp. How she loved that vigorous figure, how her heart beat to his firm step on the stairs! She had the door leading to the balcony open, and as he reached the top step she came with a little rush to meet him and flung her arms about his neck.

"Do you love me ath well ath you did yesterday?" she said.

"Speech stolen from 'a defenseless child," Hare replied in a measured tone.

Barbara's arms relaxed and her lips quivered painfully. She bit them into steadiness, and said, as gaily as she could:

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"Come along in and light your pipe."

A fire was burning on the hearth. As she knelt to light a match for him she made a pretty picture, and he smiled down on her affectionately.

"One more kiss?" he asked.

"Not till you've earned it. Tell me all about your day."

Hare gave her a colorless account, mentioning that he had got in an extra game of tennis that afternoon. Barbara reflected that the day was Saturday, and that, therefore, he had seen Helen Farley every day that week except Friday. Her own allowance was now every other day.

"Dear," she said, "I wish I could hear from you by telephone on the days that we don't meet."

Hare poked at the tobacco in his pipe, and said in a considering tone and without looking at her:

"Somehow, telephoning to you wouldn't quite seem natural. It isn't part of my habits."

Barbara sat droopingly in her chair. "I thought we were to make me a part of your habits," she murmured.

"So we were, and so we are; I should say you had worked into my life here, Babbie. But you have your own set of vibrations, so to speak. It's sweeter to look forward to coming back to you, without the irritation of half tasting you through a telephone."

The words were right, Barbara considered, but they did not flow out with the spontaneity she wanted. She went to him and, sitting on the footstool by his Morris chair, laid her head upon his knee. He looked down at her wistful face.

"Dear little Barbara," he said, "you're so brave, such a good sport, and—from a worldly standpoint you ought to chuck me."

Again Barbara felt the dull, sick chill that had smitten her when his mother had spoken of his proposal to the rich girl.

"Do you want me to chuck you?" she asked.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"For myself, no. But for once I am thinking of you."

Barbara knew that he would not have begun to think of her if he had not rather thoroughly exhausted his thoughts for himself. She looked up at him with grave, troubled eyes.

"Leonard," she said, "when I questioned you this summer about your emotional life, why did you not tell me that you had already tried to marry?"

She watched him narrowly, but she could not see that his face changed.

"I told you all that had any bearing on our possible arrangement. I told you that once or twice I had fancied myself in love, but that the fancy had not lasted more than a fortnight. I was perfectly honest with you."

Barbara was hurt and angry, but she tried to crush down her emotions. She tried to remember that Hare was reticent by nature—and yet, she had asked him so frankly to be open with her.

"You may have been honest in your intention, Leonard," she said, "but you were not honest in effect. Having a fancy for two weeks is a very different thing from going so far as to propose to a woman. You are pretty cautious; you'd not have proposed unless you had been sure of yourself."

"You're quite mistaken," Hare said, crisply. "I was taken with this girl; I'd known her before, but we were thrown together in the mountains under especial circumstances, and for two weeks I thought I cared, and I proposed before the two weeks were up. The day after she refused me I wondered what on earth I should have done if she had accepted me."

"But last summer," Barbara said, "you told me that you cared more for me than for any one. Do you mean that, caring for her less than for me, you yet asked her to marry you?"

"I do," Hare replied; "it was because I saw what a

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

mistake I'd made in proposing to her that I was—careful last summer.”

Barbara's face flamed. Was it to this that their idyl had come, this discussion of what was or was not safe emotionally for Hare? She faced the facts of the summer as she had never faced them before. She had had no question of wisdom or of good and bad taste in the matter at all; she considered that she had merely been breaking a convention. She had gone against the social convictions of millions of women, convictions which had built up the convention she had violated. To keep the social law was to be safe. Barbara still had no sense of wrong, but she saw that she had been a stupid traitor to the feelings and the traditions of her sex—feelings and traditions built, doubtless, on secret and painful research and history. How many women had suffered before the prudent law had been fixed!—and she had disregarded their crystallized warning.

“Who is this woman?” she asked.

“I'm not going to tell you her name, Barbara,” he returned in a cold tone. “I'll tell you everything else about her—”

“Of course I have no right to ask,” Barbara said, bitterly.

“You'd have no right in any case,” he replied. “This is a woman who lived at the time in Pasadena, very sweet and good. She's not so charming as you and not so clever. She already cared for some one else at the time I asked her, and she refused me in a very beautiful and sympathetic way.”

Barbara was careful to note that in “telling her everything else” he was speaking in the most general way, and had neglected to mention the woman's wealth. It was evidently one of his habits to give as little information as possible.

“Did you always see very much of her?” she asked, jealously.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"Considerable; not so much as I saw of Mrs. Farley."
"I know so little of your life and your code, after all," Barbara said. "Supposing we were married, should you expect to play tennis with Mrs. Farley twice a week, should you want to have tea alone with her on Wednesday? Should you want to telephone her every day at noon?"

Hare withdrew his pipe and gripped the stem between his fingers.

"Have you been spying on me, Barbara?" he inquired.

"Not at all. Everything I have said to you has come to me naturally. Considering our relations, you might have told them all to me."

"Why should I?" he asked. "Every friendship has its own rights. If you and I were married, I should expect us each to have our own friends."

"Oh, but what chance would I have, coming here a stranger, to win any friends but yours? It's not fair. Tell me, should you expect to see so much of Mrs. Farley if we were married?"

Hare spoke as if unwillingly. "I suppose I shouldn't," he said. "I suppose that is the way it would work out."

He sat with compressed lips for a few moments; then he relit his pipe, and said in his usual amiable tone:

"Come, Barbara, I'm afraid we're getting a little cross with each other, and there's no necessity for that. Admit that I've been honest with you. It couldn't have made any difference in your decision if I'd told you of this matter."

"Oh, Leonard, I think you owed me that," Barbara said. "You know I told you at the time that I was taking a greater risk than you were. If we were both anxious to guard ourselves—you from proposing to me whom you did not really love, and I not to enter into a relation which might shipwreck me—we surely owed each other not only justice, but generosity. If anything, you should

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

have been painfully scrupulous to keep me safe. Chivalry to an unprotected woman demanded that."

Hare flushed deeply; his face grew hard and his mouth cruel. Barbara had never seen him angry before; but, though she was afraid, she looked at him steadily.

"You're going pretty far, Barbara," he said. "Can you honestly declare that—that—" He paused.

"Do you mean," Barbara cried, "that I'd have gone into it no matter what you told me? Leonard, you will please to remember how hard I tried to get the truth from you. If I had known of this other attachment of yours, if I had known how closely your life is bound up with Mrs. Farley's I'd have turned the hesitation I felt into a refusal. You didn't really need me in your life here; you didn't need any woman. You've got all the feminine influence a man of your nature can respond to."

"Take care, Barbara!" he warned.

Barbara was launched on a dangerous tide; she knew the stubborn, steadfast operations of his mind, but she was unable to control the flood of words that surged to her lips.

"Why shouldn't I tell you what's true?" she cried; "and it's true that I've taken all the risks and you've taken none! You remember what Meredith says? 'Possession without obligation to the possessed approaches felicity.' You should know!"

"Will you tell me," Hare said in a harsh, grating voice, "exactly what you expect to gain by this explosion?"

Barbara's racing pulses quieted. Oh, what could she gain, and what could she not lose? Did she have the courage to continue, to say unforgivable things so that he could never again see her, so that perforce this losing fight should end? Was she brave enough to decide her lot one way or the other now or must she let it come to a dragging close? And what could that close mean but loss? Then she knew, with a sick sense of shame, that she must wait till the end.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

She stretched out her arms to him. "Oh, forgive me, my dear," she said. "I've been so unhappy all day. I haven't meant to annoy you."

"It doesn't matter," he said, coldly.

"Shall—shall I move away from you?" she asked, brokenly.

"No, stay; perhaps your nearness will help me get over what I'm feeling," he said in the same cold tone. "I don't often get angry, Barbara, but I've been angrier tonight than ever in my life before. It makes me feel sick all over."

"Are—are you changed toward me?" she whispered.

"Permanently, no; temporarily, yes. I can't help it, Barbara. It's gone just so on the several occasions when mother and I have disagreed. I couldn't feel the same until several days had passed. Perhaps a woman—some women, at least—can explode suddenly and think that things are unchanged. But I'm not like that. If you so judge me, we'd better— But we won't talk of it!"

This, Barbara thought, dearly, came from the impulse to make him see the facts as she saw them. A man naturally does not wish to face facts which put him at a disadvantage. She had gained nothing but the momentary satisfaction of speaking the truth; and perhaps she had lost a great deal. She sat drooping at his feet and contemplated the future. Even if he came to love her with the best that was in him, what was that best worth? He would live a large part of his life without her; he would have reticences, withdrawals. Much that she might share he would not offer to her. She would have to make many compromises. At the best it all spelled little happiness for her, and yet she could not give him up.

After a time Hare rose. "It's no use, Barbara," he said. "I'll have to leave you. I'll come back to you when I feel as I did before; it may be in three or four days; it may be a fortnight. You'll have to forgive me. I'll come to you as soon as I can again."

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

She rose and stood before him with bowed, miserable face. He kissed her, and she had the impulse to fling her arms about him, to make him melt. But she knew he would repulse her, and her beaten pride could endure no more. He left her at the door without his customary look backward, and when the sound of his footsteps had died away she threw herself on her bed in tearless misery.

For several days she went about her work draggingly. On the Wednesday after Hare had left her she telephoned Helen Farley, hoping that Helen would mention Hare. But Helen merely reproached her for not having called recently. Barbara said she would come to tea the following Saturday. On Friday Annie Bestor took her for a drive. Barbara looked wan and sick from sleeplessness. Every evening she hoped against hope that Hare would come, and when it was too late to expect him she went to bed and wept herself almost ill. Annie Bestor had noted her condition with concern.

"I'm afraid, dear girl," she said, after they had driven for several miles through soft, luxuriant country, "that the change out here hasn't done for you all I had hoped it would."

Annie Bestor had dropped her preceptress manner and was once more not the employer, but the friend of the previous summer. Barbara leaned her head against the older woman's shoulder, with a gesture of weariness and dependence.

"Oh, I'm not much good," she said. "I wish I were just one of your little school-girls. Oh—no; almost I wish I were back in my engagement days, understanding what I do now. He loved me so wonderfully—Mr. Rhodes—and I didn't understand how rare love is."

Annie Bestor patted Barbara's cheek with her free hand. "A beautiful memory like that is worth having," she said; "think of the many women who have had nothing in their lives."

"Ah—but if I had understood," Barbara murmured.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"I've been thinking of him so much lately. At times it almost seems as if he must come alive and help me, just because he once loved me so perfectly."

Annie Bestor drove in silence for a little while. Then she said in a dry, strained tone: "Barbara dear, if at any time it gets to be too hard here, if you want to go away, just give me a little notice. I'll release you."

Barbara stiffened; then any desire for disguise fell from her. "So—you know?" she said.

"I guessed that you were engaged in the mountains; then I decided that you weren't; that you shared one of those flexible and detestable relations called 'an understanding.' It seemed to me that you were pretty well suited; in any case I was afraid you cared. So—well, knowing what a deliberate and cautious creature Dr. Hare is, I thought a little propinquity would help—"

So Annie Bestor did not wholly understand. Barbara wanted sympathy, but her instinct of self-preservation awoke.

"You're so good," she said. "And I'm afraid we're not suited, after all. We've had a quarrel, but we'll make it up. It's only that I'm beginning to think we'd not be happy together."

"Count on me," Annie Bestor said, "if ever I can do anything to help."

The next afternoon, though she was feeling ill, Barbara made her promised call on Helen Farley. They had tea in Helen's summer-house on the hill. The garden was brilliant with flowers, a greenwood near them tossed its branches with the movement of sea-lions, and far away shimmered a group of misty blue hills. The whole scene was one of peace and luxury. Barbara looked at Helen's pretty hands over the tea-service, thinking of the many times Hare must have watched them. They talked idly, as always, each scrutinizing every chance word of the other.

"Have you seen Lucia Streeter yet?" asked Helen.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"She's been here two weeks. She called on me Wednesday."

She frowned a little, and Barbara wondered if that frown meant that Lucia had interrupted Hare's call.

"She hasn't let me know of her arrival," Barbara said.

Barbara was quite clear that Lucia would contrive that they should not meet. They could never be together without remembering that dreary day when the court had declared Thornton guilty of embezzlement and Lucia had shown the measure of her cowardice. Barbara despised her less than she had. The revelation of her own weakness and cowardice had taught her tolerance. Yet it was as well that they should see nothing of each other.

"She doesn't look in very good condition," Helen said. "Do you suppose she is sorry she broke off her engagement?"

"I don't know," Barbara replied. "Stephen Thornton is well worth grieving over. I don't see how any one who loved him could desert him."

"If there is spiritual desertion, physical desertion might as well follow," Helen remarked.

"It was no use trying to hold her if she wanted to go, I dare say," Barbara replied, thinking not of Thornton and Lucia, but of herself and Hare.

"I suppose the right kind of man wouldn't try to hold a woman who wanted to be free," Helen said. "I know I'd not stay with my husband a minute after he ceased to need me."

Oh, thought Barbara, there spoke the woman who was sure she would always be needed, precisely because she did not care enough to really mind if she were not needed.

"The hardest thing of all," Helen said, "is to want to be needed—needed fully, and to know that one isn't, can never be, because of the temperament of the person one loves."

The eyes of the two women met, and Barbara at last read Helen Farley's heart. She loved Hare, and knew

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

that she was not necessary to him, that no woman was really necessary to him. Their looks clung for a moment, and then fled apart. One had shown and the other had read too much. But whatever jealousy lay between them vanished from that moment. In the realest sense they were both losers; they looked at the numb, arid stretches in the same man's soul, and acknowledged a kinship of hopeless longing.

"Annie Bestor would say that the world needs us all," Barbara said, trying in banal fashion to lead the talk to safer ground.

"And you need more tea," Helen said. "Give me your cup."

The tenth day after he had left her Hare came back. She heard him on the stairs, on the balcony, at the door, but she could not rise. He came over to the chair where she sat, and took her in his arms.

"Dear," he said, "I've come back. Almost it's been worth the pain, just to have you again. Won't you say something?"

"I—can't," Barbara whispered.

"Then I'll say it. Dear little love! Isn't that what you want? Dear little love."

Barbara broke into tears and clung to him, and mingling with her unabated love was once more the phantom of hope.

"Yes, Barbara," he said, slowly, "I care more for you than I had dreamed I could—and things cannot go on as they have any longer."

Mutely she listened to him. Was he going to tell her that he loved her, that he wanted her? He felt a pang of reproach as he met her wistful eyes. Yes, he wanted her, but not as she hoped. Their philandering had not led to the goal for which in his basest moments he had designed it. Barbara's imperturbable innocence had been disarming, and gradually he had come to know that such innocence could only mean that she had never been

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

Rhodes's wife. He did not want to be bound; he only wanted to taste Barbara to see whether he could then consent to be bound. But it was impossible to tell her that. Almost before he realized it the solution to his problem leaped into words.

"Barbara," he said, "will you consent to a secret marriage?"

XXI

THE MARRIAGE

A SECRET marriage! When Hare proposed it all the blood in Barbara's body seemed to her to have become leaden, to be weighing her down, abasing her physically as her spirit was abased. She had a curious feeling that the old Barbara Langworthy was standing tall and straight, and looking down contemptuously on Hare's woman in the dust.

"Sit down, Leonard," she heard herself saying.

They faced each other gravely.

"Why a secret marriage?" she asked.

He stirred uneasily.

"Barbara—need we put it into words?" he murmured.

"We put our other—arrangement into words," she reminded him.

"Well, then, if you'll have it so—this present arrangement can't go on; my nerves won't stand it. The thing to do is part or—" He paused.

"Part or marry, yes?" she prompted.

"Oh, Barbara," he said, "I wish to God I cared for you without reservations. I can't be bound to a woman I don't love. I want to give you and myself every chance, and a—a kind of tentative marriage would do that."

"I see. You want a path of retreat, the path that the easy divorce laws of California will permit; a safeguard."

"For you as well as for myself," he said, annoyed at her bitter tone. "And you know you need not accept my proposal, Barbara."

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

She drooped. It was true. She was free, superficially, and yet as entirely in his power as if she were already married to him. She remembered how he had deceived her, she recalled that all his precautions had been for his own sake and never for hers. She saw what a long, shameful way the pride of Barbara Langworthy had come—and yet she felt that she had no choice.

"Do you know that I love you?" she asked, abruptly.

"Barbara—I—" he stammered.

"Of course you do; perhaps you knew in the mountains. I was dishonest then, but I won't be dishonest now. If I didn't love you, Leonard, I'd be leaving you now, for ever."

"Barbara—am I not doing the best I can for us both?" he asked.

She looked at him steadily. If she had dared let herself, she could have sounded the depths of his secret selfishness. She would have known that he wanted her without marriage, but that he feared the quality of a woman who would have given herself without the formal sanction of the bond.

"I'm taking what I believe is our final chance of happiness," he said.

Ah, why probe after his faults? Why not try to build up a new trust in him and be grateful for compromises? Barbara asked herself. Surely that was her only chance of happiness.

"I think I see what you mean, Leonard," she said, bravely, "and of course it's sensible. I'm sorry; I wish you cared as much as I do, but as I said to you once when the issues were nothing like so deep as they are now, we must each love as much as we can. It's only that I never have believed in divorce—"

Her voice broke. To her, at its lowest, a marriage had always been a contract, not to be broken; and at its highest, a noble, perfect union, where love was so strong that there could be no thought of rights or terms. Divorce

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

had always seemed to her a stigma—even a disgrace. It was not merely that she was personally humiliated by this wide gate of retreat which Hare proposed to leave open behind him. Besides that, all that was moral and esthetic in her shrank from this desecration of marriage. For it seemed to her to be winning marriage on the assumption that one would cheat in the game afterward if one did not like it. Barbara was conservative; she was perhaps something of a coward; certainly she had an old-fashioned passion for whatever elements of safety there are in marriage.

"But, Barbara," Hare protested, "if I ceased to love you, surely you wouldn't want me to go on living with you? A man wouldn't. I wouldn't stay with you if you stopped loving me."

Barbara made no reply. With her mind she argued that she should not want to be Hare's wife if he had ceased to love her; with every nerve in her body she felt that she should never want to give him up, would always fight to win him. Then she must win now—and surely opposition, discontent, were not adroit weapons.

"You are quite right, Leonard," she said. "There is no other way except to part or to undertake this trial marriage. But why a secret marriage, since we are ready to admit that it may end at will?"

"There are a number of reasons for that," he said, his eyes on the floor. "There is my mother; she is getting interested in the housekeeping and I don't want to take that away from her, and she'd surely hand it over to you. Besides, she'd drop into her old subservient manner to you, and I don't want that to happen. I'm hoping to build up a new life, a new psychology, for mother out here."

Ordinarily Barbara would have been touched by Hare's reference to his mother, but now she was searching his face, his mind, for all that lay behind his words.

"Then," he went on with a short laugh, "I've a couple of neurasthenic lady patients. Such people as that are

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

always in love with their doctor. I don't want to retard their cure by letting them know I'm married."

"Leonard, you can't be serious!" she cried.

"Certainly I'm serious," he said. "My patients are my work, and I'm leading these sick creatures back to sanity and health. It's just a symptom that they should be leaning so hard on me personally, but it's a symptom I have to take account of."

Barbara looked at him in amazement. How strange men were when their work was concerned! "I wish I were one of your patients," she murmured.

"Then," he went on in a business-like tone, "you have to think of Annie Bestor. You wouldn't want to leave her without a teacher, to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" Barbara said.

She looked up at him with a bewildered expression. Then her face changed to a shy bride's face. Hare caught her in his arms and held her close.

"Ah, Barbara, dear little one," he cried, "won't you try this way?" He kissed her passionately.

"Yes, yes, yes," Barbara said, his lips on hers. "I'll love you as never woman loved man before—or perhaps I'll love you less, and then you'll adore me."

"We'll love each other," he said, "from to-morrow. It will be to-morrow, Barbara?"

He felt her heart beating heavily. "To-morrow," she said, "and there's a holiday on Monday—three days' honeymoon, Leonard."

"A whole life, I hope," he said, gravely.

And looking into his eyes, she forgot to probe his deeper reasons for wanting to keep their marriage secret; she only knew that she was being offered another chance to win him and, as life went, perhaps the most certain. He understood far better than she did that there was left only a fighting chance.

"My gallant Barbara," he whispered; "we'll make it yet!"

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

He left her early, protesting that he had a long day before him if he was to get away by the next evening. When he kissed her good-by he whispered that there would be no good-by to-morrow, and she hid her face on his shoulder. He went away pleased, exultant. Barbara returned to her little living-room, remembering that she had forgotten to ask him where they were going. She recalled with a tender little smile all the plans poor Huntley Rhodes had made for their honeymoon, and how tentatively he had presented each one to her for her approval, so ready to change anything that did not please her.

"Ah," said Barbara, "I never thought of that as a real marriage, but it was a real love that was offered me then; and this—"

She lay sleepless, as she had so long ago on that night before she became Barbara Rhodes. Then she had hoped to wake up the next morning a new Barbara, with different feelings. She no longer hoped for that, but she wished that such a dream might come true; she wished that she might go into her new life gratefully and confidently—glad of what Hare could give her and certain that his love would some day equal hers. Dust and ashes—was that what a passionate longing came to when it was realizable? For she had wanted above all things to become Hare's wife, and now she stood at the door of fulfilment with fainting heart and dreary eyes.

There was nothing for her to do the next day but pack her dress-suit case and wait for Hare. Again she thought of the day, ten years before, when Grassmere had been crowded with guests come to see little Barbara Langworthy married, their voices filling the lower part of the house while Anita and Sissy put her in her gown of white. Now no one knew, and who in all California would really have cared as poor Gilbert had cared, or even Mrs. Langrel? Barbara felt very lonely. For some time she had not worn the rings Rhodes had given her, but now she slipped on a thin gold band set in pearls which had been

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

his mother's engagement ring. Wearing it made her feel less isolated. Hare had told her to meet him at the railway station at four o'clock. She was there before the hour, yet when it was well past the hour he had not come. She reflected that usually it is the bride who keeps the bridegroom waiting, but that in this case all was reversed. She had been lacking in pride, in the finest self-respect, and she would be penalized through many humiliations. It was nearly five when at last he appeared, rather breathless and full of apologies.

"Never did I have such a day," he told her. "All Pasadena seemed to fall sick. When I did get my schedule arranged, and told those that had to be told that I was going away, they showed an insatiate curiosity as to where."

"So am I curious," said Barbara, with a whimsical smile.

"How adorable you look!" he said.

It was characteristic of him, once he had decided on the marriage, to see all its present advantages. Barbara in her dark-blue suit, with its touch of scarlet, and the scarlet feather in her hat, her eyes trustful, her face glowing, was sufficiently alluring. She was so utterly his.

"Come along. We're late," he said. "Where is your suit-case? We'll not be able to get a train; we'll have to have a car."

As she followed him out of the station he said to her, smilingly, "You'd like to get married first, wouldn't you?"

In a sudden flash of remembrance she saw Rhodes's worshipping face as he had waited for her beside the clergyman while she walked toward him on Gilbert's arm.

"I'd certainly like to be married before dinner," she said, falling into Hare's tone. "I'd like to have it off my mind."

He beckoned to a taxicab. "I've already engaged the man," he said, as he helped her in. "I've spoken to the

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

minister, too. License in one pocket, ring in another, tooth-brush forgotten; but never mind."

Barbara was glad that they were going to be married by a minister, and not by a justice of the peace. She knew that Hare had no religious sentiment, and she took it as a hopeful augury that he had respected hers. Yet she did not feel at all as if she were going to be married, not even when they stood before a benign old minister, whose spinster daughter witnessed the ceremony, with a wistful look in her eyes. She was a woman who had sat many times at feasts spread for others, yet nothing had dulled her sense of romance. Her face said that she was glad love was somewhere in the world, even if it were not for her. Barbara saw her only for a few minutes, but she took away an impression of faith and sacrifice that was an inspiration for many a day. Barbara watched this woman as she made her own responses, repeating the promises she had given on behalf of Rhodes so long ago. Her lips quivered as she heard Hare promise to cleave to her in sickness and in health, for better or worse, until death parted them. That silent reservation, "I promise in case I care to keep the promise," rose up to mock the grave words of the service.

Presently they were driving along rapidly in the soft darkness, hand in hand, both of them rather solemn. Hare felt Barbara's hand trembling in his; he felt her nearness; he had sudden realization of the pathetic side of her love.

"Barbara, oh, Barbara, I'll be good to you!" he whispered.

She pressed her face against his arm. "I know, Leonard," she said.

They left the lights of the city behind, the stars quivered in the dark sky, and now and then they heard voices from little houses. Yet Barbara felt that they were rushing along in a narrow world of their own, with no past and no future. She would have been content to go on so for ever.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"We'll not have dinner till close to eight," Hare told her. "My fault for being late."

"As if it mattered," she said.

At last the car stopped and Barbara lifted her head. They were in front of a small inn set abruptly against a wall of trees. Hare helped her out, and paid and dismissed their driver. A porter took their bags and Hare led her into a home-like-looking office, and then up-stairs and into a room where a table was set for two.

"Come here, dear," he said. "Come out here."

He drew her upon a balcony. The moon had just risen, and by its dim light she could see a forest stretching before them like a sea.

"Dear little one," he whispered. "We're going to begin over here—not in the mountains again—but close to the good earth. To-morrow we'll tramp and fish, but it shall be a new setting. Do you like it, Barbara?"

"Oh, so much!" she said.

She was touched by his sentiment of beginning over, and more hopeful than she had been before. She clung to him and they stood together in silence until a waiter, anxious to be released for the evening, coughed suggestively behind them.

"Will you come to dinner with me, Mrs. Hare?" Barbara's husband said.

She looked up at him with shining, happy eyes.

"Anywhere," she told him.

An hour later they were sitting on the balcony, hand in hand once more. Barbara had eaten almost nothing and had rather wondered at Hare's interest in food. He had told her where they were—eighty miles from Los Angeles, in a corner of the world which few people frequented and where no one they knew would come, since it was so close to Christmas-time. Barbara had given no sign that the allusion to the necessity for secrecy hurt her. She had vowed to make the most of her marriage and of all it promised her. Yet, for all Hare's nearness, for all the

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

pressure of his hand, she could not feel that she was married. Even when he began whispering the ardent words that had been so often on his lips in the high Sierras, even then she had a strange sense of unreality, as if she were day-dreaming and would wake up to her old sad doubts about him. It was not until he drew her to her feet, lingeringly, whispering that the night air was chill and he must take her inside, that she began to realize that she was alone with her husband.

Two days later they stood on the balcony, telling the forest good-by. It had been a wonderful two days. In their long tramps, their long talks, their long hours of close silence, Barbara felt that they had come back to each other; that whatever they had lost they had regained.

"Have I been tender to you?" he whispered.

"Oh, so good!"

"You're happy?"

"Yes; and you?"

"Happier even than I thought I'd be," said Hare. "You're wonderful."

Ah, surely he must love her—surely he loved her already, Barbara thought. Now that they were really married, now that they really belonged to each other, he would forget his treacherous caution, he would read his feelings more generously, more truly than he had in the past. She was too inexperienced to know that a man's psychology in love is never the same as a woman's, that biology plays her false. The exultance of possession in her husband she mistook for something larger and more permanent.

"I'll always love the thought of this place," she said as they turned away.

She hoped he would echo the sentiment, but he had perceived a broken buckle upon her suit-case and was pre-occupied. She smiled at him with indulgent motherliness, but she was the first to leave the room, and she did

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

not look back. It was with such futile little pretenses that she tried to fortify her self-respect.

They went back to Los Angeles by train. Hare took Barbara to her lodging. When she unlocked the door she threw it wide and said:

"Welcome home, Leonard."

She looked about her little rooms with new eyes. She must make him feel that they were indeed home.

"You'll not send me away now?" Hare said. "You'll let me stay to-night? I can get away in the gray of the morning. It will be perfectly safe; one would think we'd got the rooms on purpose."

Barbara felt a little chilled, but she said, gaily, "Of course I'll not send you away till I must."

"I'll come often and often," he whispered. "You can't get rid of a husband too easily, madame!"

Barbara bit her lip. How easy it would have been to make some jesting remark about the facile divorce laws of California—how easy, if only those same laws had not entered into their bargain.

"As long as you behave lak quality, as Mammy Kate used to say, you may stay in our little home," she said, smilingly.

Before he awoke, Barbara got up, closed the windows, built a fire in the living-room, and made him a cup of coffee. He was to collect many memories of Barbara, but there was none sweeter to him than the picture he opened his eyes to that morning of Barbara, in a scarlet dressing-gown, leaning over him, crooning him awake.

"I'm sorry, my darling, but you must go," she said.

"Barbara," he said, slowly, "you are the most lovable woman in the world. Put down that cup and come to me."

Ah, but he didn't say he loved her, she thought.

"You've only time to drink the coffee. I'll let you kiss me good-by once," she said, with a pretty assumption of severity.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"How I enjoy having you slave for me," he said, and she divined that at the bottom of his heart he was pleased that Barbara Langworthy was serving "little Leonard Hare."

When he was ready to go he said, "Look out and see if the coast's clear."

She opened the door and glanced out. A few laborers were going to work, hurrying along in the rain. No one was near and no one was looking.

"All clear," she said.

She clung about his neck. His farewell was all she could have wished. He seized his suit-case and made for the door. An early delivery-man, coming around the side of the house, saw him in a casual glance.

"Damn!" muttered Hare.

He hurried down the outside stairs and into the street, his hat pulled over his eyes. He did not look back. Slowly Barbara closed the door, a sick sense of shame in her heart. No wife should be forced to have her husband leave her in any such furtive way. No man would exact it of a woman whom he really loved. Must she always be reminded that she was only a plaintive suitor at the gate of love?

XXII

THE LOSS

AT first Barbara was happier than she had been even in the mountains. She was sure of Hare in a way she had not been before. There was not a day that he failed to come to her, not a parting when he did not show reluctance in leaving her. A new, happy confidence in her growing power to hold him intensified her charms and brought out in her allures and coqueties he had not dreamed her capable of. There were moments, too, when all these fell away and he saw his generous, truth-loving Barbara on a height toward which he gazed, and felt that not to love her heartily would be a keen spiritual loss.

Yet from the very beginning there were dissatisfactions which Barbara had to struggle against. One of these came when he told her that he could not spend Christmas day with her.

"I'm just as sorry about it as you can be, dear little love," he said, smoothing her brown hair as she sat on the footstool beside him, her head against his knee. "But I don't see how I can break the old custom—"

"What has the old custom been?" Barbara asked, pensively.

"Usually I had the noon meal with the Streeters, or some other friends, depending on who asked me first, and invariably I had the night meal with the Farleys, the children's Christmas tree coming afterward."

"You don't mean to say," Barbara cried, with the sympathy for children which he loved in her, "that they

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

make those poor children wait till Christmas night for their presents?"

He nodded. "I've never liked it, either. But, Babbie, I was going to say that mother asked me if I wouldn't have the noon meal alone with just her. She doesn't want to go very much to the Farleys' at night, but of course she will. She seems to think she'll gather strength for it if she and I are alone, just as we so often were on Christmas day when I was a little boy."

"It's quite all right, dearest," Barbara said. "I don't see how you can get out of it; but of course it's natural for me to feel that I don't see how I'm going to get along without you, isn't it?"

"I suppose it is, you sentimental goose."

"Mrs. Farley wrote me to-day," she said, after a pause, "asking me to dine there Christmas night."

"Did she?" he replied in an even tone.

His face, as she glanced up into it, was inscrutable. He went on filling his pipe. Inwardly she sighed; she had half hoped that he had been told of the invitation, or at least would want her to accept it. Since their marriage they had not spoken of Helen.

"You'd rather I didn't accept?"

"Do you want to go?" he parried.

"No."

Barbara was sure that she did not want Helen to see them together; almost she was sure that she did not want to see Helen alone. If she could have chosen she would have taken Hare back to Grassmere and lived with him proudly before the eyes of all who had known them. Since her life was what it was she wanted to see as little as possible of all those who still thought of her as Barbara Rhodes.

"But why don't you want me to go?" she persisted.

"I didn't say I didn't want you to accept. I want you to do as you like."

His tone was careful, and yet Barbara was sure that he

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

was not telling her the truth. Ah, well, she must please him, and, besides, she certainly did not want to be one of the Farley Christmas group.

"I've two or three invitations," she said, "and now that I know your plans, I can make mine. I'll dine with Annie Bestor at night and with one of my adoring pupils at noon."

Inwardly she reflected that if only they had been leading a normal life she would not have had to hold her own plans in abeyance till she learned his; they would have made their plans together. But she did not let the thought mirror itself in her face; she smiled at him, and said that they would keep their own Christmas the day before.

The change in Barbara's spirit reacted upon her physically. Her face had a new vivacity, her step a new resilience. All that happened to her during the day she caught up vividly, transforming it with her own interest into something worthy to be related to Hare.

"You're not the same person," Annie Bestor said as they sat together over their nuts and fruit on Christmas night. "You were meager and pale a couple of weeks ago; now you have a rosy glow like a cherub; and you weigh at least five pounds more, and your feet fairly sing on the stairs!"

"'Lawsy me!' as poor Anita used to say," Barbara laughed, "you're breaking into poetry." Then she added, soberly, "Leonard and I have made up our quarrel—for a while."

She disliked the explanation. She wished that Annie Bestor need have known nothing of her acquaintance with Hare, and since she knew something, she wished she knew the whole truth.

"I hope it will be all right," Annie Bestor said. "I don't see why it shouldn't; but I don't see what you and he are dawdling about."

Barbara dropped her eyes, and the older woman went

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

on, hastily: "Do forgive me. I know that love has all sorts of vagaries. Do you know, I'm glad it has pretty well let me alone. Take it in the ups and downs, it's a pretty costly experiment—I mean love between man and woman. I am grateful for my own chance at loving young people."

"Oh, of course, love costs more than it's worth—but then, it's worth even that," Barbara said.

Much later they were talking of a rash school-girl whom Annie Bestor had saved from an elopement and who was one of Barbara's favorite pupils. From that they went on to a recital of various incidents due to the inexperience of the young in love and in life.

"But the most abominable thing I ever interfered in," Annie Bestor said, "was a proposed secret marriage."

She gave the details to Barbara, and then concluded:

"So you see he was a cad, with a selfish, low motive behind his proposition, and she was a very silly child. He only wanted her in this way because he couldn't get her in any other way, and he would have pitched her over when he was through with her."

Barbara's heart beat heavily. Yes, that was how such an affair would look to an outsider. She went home in a depressed mood. In the middle of the night she woke with a start. She found herself saying aloud:

"I'm not at all like a wife sure of her husband's love. I am like a mistress, searching for lures by which to hold her lover."

Her face flamed with shame at her own attack upon herself. She tried to push away the idea, not knowing that because she had let it put itself into words she had given it a dreadful kind of life to which it would cling with nagging tenacity. That Christmas day, which, according to her Langworthy traditions, should have been a symbol of family unity, really marked the beginning of a deep disunion between herself and her husband.

After Christmas the rains fell heavily and coldly.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

Californians assured Barbara that it was the bleakest January their state had ever known. Rain always depressed Hare; a dragging malarial languor added to his discomfort; and he had some puzzling and dangerous cases of illness among his patients. He said to Barbara that he would have to spend his Sundays resting in Pasadena. She agreed sympathetically; she was pathetically anxious to be reasonable. She assured him that she realized it was a tax to come even ten miles when he had so much traveling to do through the week, and she knew that a quiet day in his own house would do him good.

"Yes, I'll just lounge about at home or at the Farleys'." he replied, absently.

A quick pang had gripped Barbara. Home should not be the place where he lived with his mother, but the place where he lived with his wife. Moreover, he should not be making calls, like a bachelor, in another woman's household. She wondered if he was still seeing Helen as much as ever; she thought not, hoped not, yet she dared not ask. A wife in her proper standing before the world would have had every right to ask, would have known without asking.

By the end of January Hare was coming to her only five nights in the week. He was as affectionate as before, but very tired, and still far from well. She was patient and tender and her sympathy was very sweet to him. His languor made it easier for her to struggle against the impulse to judge him too closely. By the middle of February he was coming only every other day—just as he had before the secret marriage. Barbara made a hundred excuses for him, clinging fiercely to whatever proofs she could glean of his dependence upon her love.

One afternoon she was going home from school rather sadly; she had not seen him the day before, and she had just had a telephone message telling her he could not come that evening. As she neared her rooms she saw a pretty domestic scene in the yard of the little bungalow on the

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

corner. Two small children were playing there, while their mother sat on the steps, apparently reading a newspaper, but looking up between sentences to see that her children were still safe.

Down the street came her husband; when their looks met he took off his hat and waved it boyishly.

"Daddy's home early!" the wife called, joyously. "Run and tell him how glad you are."

The children trotted forward; the young man opened the gate, picked them up, and tossed them in the air. Then he kissed his wife, and, his arm about her waist, kept step with her into the house, the children running after them, shrieking to the father the news of their little day. The women on the neighboring porches smiled sympathetically, but not Barbara. Fierce tears stung her eyes as she hurried up the outside stairs and into her little rooms, which should have been a home and were not.

That was what married life should be: man and wife rejoicing in each other before the face of the whole world—rejoicing in each other, and in their children. There was no longer any use, Barbara told herself, in sheering away from the stark fact that she was in no better case than she had been; that she was no happier, no surer of her future, no more certain that her marriage meant permanency than she had been when Hare put his ring upon her finger. Just as in the mountains she had waited for him to say, "Barbara, I love you. When will you marry me?"—so now she waited for him to say: "Barbara, when will you come home? When may I tell the world that you are my beloved wife?"

He had told her many times that he cared for her as he had not dreamed that he could care. He had told her that he loved her more than he had in the mountains—"as was natural," he had added. But he had not said the inevitable words that would mean he wanted their marriage publicly acknowledged. Barbara was a proud woman, all the prouder because her pride had been so thoroughly

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

abased. She was a woman, too, of fine fiber, and it hurt her to have to admit that her marriage with Hare had put them upon a lower plane. For she had learned at last that there was in him a lack of idealism which she had not let herself perceive before their marriage. In some ways he was even gross. At last she let herself face the truth that he looked upon her as a mistress rather than a wife.

Her surreptitious relation with him was unworthy of them both. It was, she felt, little more than physical. To make it tolerable, to give them a chance for any permanent happiness, she should have been living in Pasadena, as his acknowledged wife, binding her life to his by a hundred little household links, by a score of little social ties, casual or deep. Marriage could not be dignified, could not be real, unless it bound man and woman together through a multitude of interests carried on with the sanction of and in the sight of the world. She should have been looking forward to rearing her children. And here was the bitterest part of Barbara's humiliation—she knew Hare did not want her to bear a child, and she had not dared speak to him of children, as a loved wife may speak to her husband. Altogether she was upon suffrance, and this suffrance was all to her disadvantage.

She thought it out, step by step, as she lay on her bed, her lips bitten, her hands clenched. And when she came to the end she saw that she was in a trap; there was nothing to do but remain passive outwardly, as she had ever since she had entered into their compact in the mountains, waiting for Hare to express himself. When she had reached that logical and bitter conclusion she heard a knock at her outer door. She sprang to her feet; perhaps it was he, after all. Without stopping to arrange her disordered hair she ran to the door and threw it open.

Helen Farley stood there, the very picture, Barbara thought, of a valued wife in good social standing. Her blue eyes gleamed at Barbara above expensive brown furs. In the street below a taxicab was waiting on her.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"It's late for a call, I know," Helen said; "but I was near here, and I thought I'd come to find out why in the world you've been cutting me. Do you know that it's six weeks since I've seen you?"

Barbara could have told her that it was nine, that they had not met since her marriage.

"Yes, it's been a long time," she said, "but I've been so busy. Do sit down. Let me make you some tea."

"Please, no tea," Helen returned.

She looked at Barbara curiously.

"I'm terribly disheveled; I've been lying down," Barbara said.

"I'm so sorry to have disturbed you," Helen returned.

Her look became inscrutable, and Barbara at once was on guard.

"I'm glad you came; it's a good end to an otherwise dull day," she said.

As always, when they met, the two talked nothings. Barbara was intensely alert; she saw Helen's glance go several times to the mantelpiece. She herself sat with her back to it, but she remembered that in the morning, when she had been dressing, she had set all Hare's photographs there in a row, to look at and talk to, and then had forgotten to remove them. She knew that Helen's apparently casual glance was really sharp as it fluttered from her face to the photographs and back again. When Helen rose to go she did not shake hands. Her words and her looks were cordial, but somehow when she went out of the door Barbara felt as if they had crossed swords. Helen, loving Hare, was quick to feel a situation that concerned him; she felt that Hare's relation to Barbara had become more vital since the two women had last met.

"Oh," cried Barbara, when the door had closed on Helen, "if only I dared say to her, 'Yes, he's mine—honorably mine.' But I've got to let her think what she likes."

Hare came, after all, that evening, and, feeling physi-

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

cally better, was more like himself than he had been for some time. Then he did not see her for four days, putting off his visit by a letter which sounded abrupt. When he did come at last she felt at once that in some way he was changed. With all her heart and mind she studied him to try to discover what had happened. It could not be, she told herself, that in a few little weeks what feeling he had for her was dwindling; even physical attraction should hold a man longer than that. She blushed with shame and misery that she should have come to speak of him and herself in such terms.

An intangible wall of restraint rose between them. Barbara did her best to remove it. Not once was she exacting; not once was she anything but sympathetic and patient and loving. There were times when Hare showed her a kind of remorseful devotion; there were other times when he showed a careful, forced affection in speech. Yet not once was there a touch of the old spontaneity. Week after week Barbara played her part, waiting for some word of explanation from him, and there were hours when she felt that he was waiting for a question from her.

In April there was a week when he did not come and sent no message. She telephoned, and was told that he was out of town. On the seventh evening, obeying an uncontrollable impulse, she went to Pasadena. She passed his house, but every window was dark; she passed his office, but it showed no light. He must be still out of town. Half unconsciously she walked to Helen Farley's house. It was well lighted; she could hear the faint tinkle of the piano. Suddenly tired, she sat down on the curbstone, secure in the merciful darkness, for the Farley house was on the edge of the town. By and by she heard footsteps on the path leading from the house. She got up and stepped close to the hedge, standing in the shadow of a tree. She did not wish to be spoken to or recognized.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

The footsteps came nearer. Two figures loomed on the path; they paused, and then drew close to the hedge.

"Good night, oh, good night!" murmured Helen Farley's voice. As if it had all somehow happened before, Barbara heard Hare's voice in reply.

"Good night, my darling Helen."

"You'll never forget? Even though I can never give you such hours again, you'll never forget?"

"Never; you've bound me to you for ever, now."

They kissed and parted. Barbara, trembling by the hedge, saw Helen go back to the house. She saw her husband stand motionless till he heard the front door close, when he walked briskly out of the gate and down the street. Barbara gazed after him uncertainly; then slowly and tremblingly she followed him, as if, after all, there could be no life for her except with him.

XXIII

THE CLINGING WIFE

BARBARA never quite knew how she came to her own rooms. She had a vivid remembrance of following Hare's alert figure until it melted down a side-street. She had a vague kaleidoscopic vision of faces and streets, and houses and cars and long walking, and at last she found herself lying on her bed, wrapped in her scarlet dressing-gown, gazing dully at the plump, unnatural flowers of the wall-paper. The gray light of the morning stole slowly through the window, and still she was unable to think, still she could only see her husband with his arms about Helen Farley, could only hear their words that proclaimed a secret relationship. Ah, well, it could be no more secret than that of Hare and herself.

It was Sunday; yet if it had been a week-day no spur of habit would have reminded Barbara of her school duties. Her whole world had shattered and she lay amid the ruins, heedless of time and place. She felt strangely passive and numb; something was going to happen presently, but she must wait for it, as she was always waiting; suspense had come to be her natural element. The maid who looked after the room came and went, and the resultant exertion suggested to Barbara that she make some tea.

Morning passed, and afternoon; the blaze of the sun mellowed to amber and then died, and a cool wind arose. But Barbara, still dazed and unthinking, was unaware that the day was spent and that twilight was drawing

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

down. When it was quite dark she turned on one light; darkness had suddenly become impossible to bear, too full of menace. When Hare came she did not hear him knock, was, indeed, hardly aware of him until he bent over the bed and looked at her.

"Are you ill?" he asked.

"I—don't think so," she said in a dull tone.

"What's the matter, Barbara?" he persisted.

"Perhaps you can tell me, Leonard."

"Ah!" His tone was significant. "Come into the other room," he added.

She rose and followed him. She stood leaning against the mantel while he found and filled his pipe. Then he sat down in the Morris chair and glanced up at her. In the dim light she looked almost pathetically young and helpless.

"Sit down, dear," he said, gently.

She did not take the footstool; she sat in a straight chair opposite, and looked up at him silently. Almost she seemed like a prisoner awaiting sentence. The thought irritated him.

"Do, for pity's sake, get a more comfortable seat, dear," he said.

Obediently she moved to the sofa.

"Well?" he asked, after a pause.

"I think it is you who are going to speak, Leonard," she said, with effort.

"Oh, my dear," he said, with a sudden yearning, "it hasn't—it won't—" He hesitated.

"Are you trying to tell me that you don't love me?" she prompted.

"Barbara, what we have hoped for can never be. I must be different from other men, or surely I could have loved you."

"You—can't?" she murmured.

"You've been so good, so generous—the sweetest and best woman I have ever known or shall ever hope to know."

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"It isn't praise I want," Barbara thought.

"Won't you say something?" he pleaded. "Tell me that you forgive me."

Suddenly Barbara knew that she could not give him the freedom that he was tacitly asking for. He did not love her, but even if he never could, and even if he did love Helen Farley, she could not feel that he was not hers. Their weeks of marriage had done their work; she belonged to the man, and every nerve in her body and soul demanded that the man should be hers.

"Is there—are you trying to tell me that you love some one else?" she asked, hoarsely.

He paused very briefly.

"No," he said, "no, Barbara. I think I am not capable of love as you gauge it. I am capable of friendship, or of passion, and at my best I am capable of a mingling of both. But I don't love any other woman."

Barbara felt a wild throb of relief, followed first by incredulity, and then by sinking shame. He did not love Helen, but he had wanted Helen to belong to him, too. She had been competing with Helen even during her brief marriage. He had been incapable of even a short loyalty—and still Barbara wanted him.

"Do you still care more for me than for any one else? Tell me the truth," she pleaded.

"Yes, Barbara," he said, readily. "But if only you knew how little I am capable—"

Barbara's sense of relief grew, and with it a kind of cold, hard determination to fight for her rights. She pushed down her pain and summoned all her energies in a struggle to win him back. She moved toward him, arms outstretched, her face luring, her voice like a dove's.

"Leonard," she murmured, "few men really know what love is. I've learned that it's women who give and men who receive, perhaps. But I'm happy in just loving you. And even if I've not been able to fill your life, I've given you golden hours. And I can give you more—yet more.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

You don't know yet the powers that are in me—what I can yield you."

She put her arms about his neck; she clung to him with an abandon she had never shown before.

"Isn't it better," she crooned, "to make the most of such love as mine, even if it isn't to be permanent? I'm not asking anything except that we seize the present while it is still ours—and, my beloved, it is still ours. I'm yours and you're mine, still!"

His arms tightened about her. He had not seen her for a week; he was ashamed and pitiful, and the best that was in him, after all, belonged to her.

"Give me your lips, Barbara," he said, hoarsely. "I'm not fit to tie your little shoes."

Long afterward Barbara opened her eyes. She had not slept; a fever of wakefulness was upon her. For the moment she had conquered, yes; but it was a cheap, fleeting victory, and she hated it, because she had bought it with the lure of the courtesan. She lived over the hours with loathing; no, no, she would try to hold him, she should fight for her rights, but never again in that way. He should have the truth; let him hate her for it if he must; surely the hate would pass, but never again should their lives be built on lies or on suppressions.

Hare was breathing evenly, but she felt that he, too, was awake. After a time he rose softly and went into the living-room. She could hear him; he was dressing; he would go away. She joined him, her face pale and pinched in the merciless full light he had turned on.

"What is it, Leonard!" she cried. "You're going back to Pasadena?"

"Yes," he said, abruptly. "Barbara—it won't do! What is the use? We'd just have other scenes like this, and other brief reconciliations, but the end would be the same."

That was characteristic of him, she reflected. She remembered that when she was leaving him in the summer

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

she had begged him to ride with her just to the next station, and he had refused, saying that the parting must come soon in any case. When he saw the end he wanted to take a short cut to it.

Barbara sat down and motioned him to his accustomed chair.

"Let us talk first," she said. "We can't come to any end by indirection. Do you realize that we have been married scarcely three months? Have you given us a fair chance?"

"Oh, Barbara," he said, mournfully, "I wronged you to marry you at all. My little passion for you was all but spent in our days of sweethearting. It was like grasping at a straw to propose this marriage, but I wanted the hope—"

"And these few weeks have made me no dearer?"

"In one way, yes; in another, no. I feel like a cad to tell you so," he said. "I feel more that you have a right in me—a right to my service and loyalty as a friend. But I don't want to be bound to you or to any woman."

Barbara drooped her head. He had simply worn out his desire more quickly than most men do. But there had been no spiritual growth, no real union.

"Oh, Barbara, my dearest," he cried, pained when he saw her head fall, "it isn't because I haven't wanted to love you."

"What do you propose, Leonard?" she asked, steadily.

"I want to be free, Barbara. I— It would be better for you to get a divorce for desertion. That could not be till after a year—"

She put her hands before her eyes. "Come back here next year and teach in Annie Bestor's school, knowing that you were here—that I mustn't see you! How could I do that, Leonard, when my life's been just you, when I've nothing but you to think about here—"

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"If it would be easier for you to go away and let me get the divorce—"

"Oh," cried Barbara, "it's never been a marriage!"

"Barbara, it hasn't come about because I haven't wanted to love you," he repeated. "Every day since we were married you've been in my thoughts and in my heart."

Barbara folded her hands and looked at him with the eyes of an outraged wife.

"In your heart every day!" she cried, fiercely. "Was I in your heart night before last when you had your arms about Helen Farley?"

He stiffened. Then he asked her, as he had once before, "Have you been spying on me, Barbara?"

"Not consciously," she cried, with rising passion. "But when I was half frantic because, for a week, you had left me, I went to Pasadena, just to look at your house, just to look at your haunts. It was so cruel to leave me—I am your wife—"

She burst into tears. He waited coldly until her hard sobbing had subsided.

"You hadn't quite finished your account, I think," he said.

"I went to Mrs. Farley's house; I wasn't going in, but I—I simply wondered if you were there. And then I saw, and I heard."

He said nothing. Barbara had half hoped for some explanation.

"Aren't you going to say anything?" she cried, wildly. "I am your wife, and you have been unfaithful to me!"

"But what is there to say, since you know it?" he asked.

"At least you owe me some kind of explanation."

"Yes, I do," he said, slowly, "and I owe Helen loyalty, too. Do you remember that I told you that once or twice in the mountains I had thought myself in love?"

"Once was when you proposed to some girl—"

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

Hare set his jaw at an ugly angle. "Once was when I proposed," he assented. "The other time was even before that, when I thought I loved Helen. I told you how good she's always been. That summer—I learned she loved me, too, but she couldn't—she didn't—"

"I see," Barbara said, hysterically, "and there was no chance of a secret marriage."

He frowned. "You make it hard for me to go on, when I think of all I owe to Mrs. Farley. She's done more for me than any woman. Her life hasn't been happy, but she's always been so brave and sweet—"

"Leonard," Barbara said, intensely, "you may not realize it, but I am suffering unspeakably from jealousy, from hurt love—"

"I wish we needn't have spoken of her," he muttered. "I can't make you understand, I am afraid, Barbara. If I had really loved you, it couldn't have happened, of course. But of late weeks she has seemed to be more dependent on me—she has made me feel that if it were all to do over—"

"But, Leonard," she sobbed. "When you were married to me—"

"That's what I can't make you see," he interrupted. "It was because I was bound to you, without loving you, and a love was offered that was free and that I had once wanted— Say that I was base, if you will. I cannot speak more plainly than I have without hurting and insulting you more than I have."

"And showing yourself to be—degraded," Barbara said in a tone of infinite sadness.

"I have no defense."

"Leonard, you know that you have been disloyal to her as well as to me. Do you dream that she would have—yielded if she had known I was your wife?"

He remembered the perfumed twilights when, night after night, he had somehow found himself with Helen, scarcely realizing whether he was there at his initiative

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

or hers. He remembered that night when they were alone in the house; even the Japanese servants had gone, and the lights went out, and the hearth-fire glimmered like jewels. Helen's hands had gone out to him, Helen's low, pulsing voice had told him that she could not bear her life any longer—

"It would sound stupid if I told you I forgot you—forgot I was married," he said. "Barbara, you can't fully analyze, and you can never fully explain, such a situation—"

"Oh, I understand now," Barbara cried in a passion of jealousy. "She came here; she saw your photographs; she felt that in some way or other you and I belonged to each other. She set out to get you for herself fully in the one way that was left her."

He looked at her significantly, and again Barbara put her hands before her eyes. Had she not, in consenting to the secret marriage, done much as Helen had? Both had played for a worthless stake—only not worthless to them. In a flash of insight she saw that in the end both would lose.

"I despise you, but I can't help loving you," she said.

"Barbara, time will help you," he said, with an unconscious fatuousness that maddened her. "The time will come when you will love some one who is more worthy of your riches of temperament than I am."

"How I hate myself!" she went on.

He did not understand, quite.

"Neither of us can help what we are like nor what life has done for us," he said.

Barbara sat looking at him; the gray dawn crept in and Hare snapped off the lights.

"I must go," he said.

"Leonard," she cried, dully, "I can't free you; I can't. I know that I could sue you for adultery—"

"You'd not do that!" he said.

"I wouldn't hurt Helen Farley," she replied. "I'm

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

sorry for her, as I should be sorry for any woman who loved you. I—just can't let you go!"

Again his jaw made the ugly angle that hurt and terrified her. "Remember our bargain," he said. "It was to be a trial marriage only. You must play fair."

"Oh, play fair!" she cried, passionately. "Did you play fair with me when you proposed?"

"As fair as you did," he said in a bitter voice. "At the bottom of your mind, Barbara, you knew quite well what the whole thing meant."

Outside she heard the milk-wagons clinking down the street, the herald of the busy life of the day. The acrid smell of kitchen smoke wafted to her nostrils; somewhere in the building a baby began to cry. She looked about her incredulously. Could her life have come to this! She and Leonard were quarreling in a sordid way, and only a few hours ago there had been vows—embraces—

"I can't understand," she murmured.

Hare found his hat. "This is good-by, Barbara," he said. "It can't go on; I want my freedom. When you are able to talk reasonably about it send for me."

He went out, closing the door softly after him. She heard his footsteps receding down the staircase. He was gone. She felt faint and ill. She remembered that she had had almost nothing to eat the day before, and that it was Monday morning, and soon a roomful of school-girls would be waiting for her. She would meet them; she would not fail Annie Bestor, the one person in California who had shown her unselfish kindness.

She dressed and went to the nearest restaurant for breakfast. She ate mechanically, and took her way mechanically to the school. She did her work adequately, all the time feeling as if it were some one else who was going through the motions. Annie Bestor she avoided; that kindly friend's perceptions were too keen. Barbara was again numb, but she felt as if suffering were waiting on the threshold, ready to seize her. It was not till she

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

was back in her room at night that pain had its way with her.

Day after day Barbara struggled. Pride and shame urged her to give Hare his freedom. What though she did not believe in divorce. What though the bond of marriage was to her a thing sacred, unbreakable. Her real reason for wanting Hare was because she was his and felt that he must be hers. Her love made her seek for all sorts of specious excuses. If only Leonard had allowed them more time! If only Leonard would acknowledge the marriage and live openly, as they should, with the sanction of society! And constantly a little sane voice whispered to Barbara that no man can be forced to love a woman, that no man can be held even formally against his will, that once a man's love is dead, no power under the skies can rekindle it. But she refused to hear the voice; her dreadful emotional tenacity made her believe that there must be some way yet of winning her husband.

He did not return and he sent no word. After a few days she wrote him an imploring letter, begging him to come to her. He replied briefly that there was no use in coming, for that his resolution had not changed, and would not. Upon reading his letter, she telephoned him; his secretary answered and presently said that Dr. Hare was in, but was too busy to talk to Mrs. Rhodes. Barbara sent a message asking when he would call her up, and the reply was returned that he would call upon her in a day or two. Two days passed, and he did not come. Then she wrote him that she was desperate, that she must see him, and that if he did not come to her she would go to his house. As Barbara Hare penned the words Barbara Langworthy stood by, watching in scorn and pity.

"If only I fall low enough," poor Barbara Hare sighed, "perhaps I can begin to climb up once more to dignity and self-respect."

The next afternoon he called. He kept his car before the door, and he entered her rooms in a tentative manner.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

She stood by the mantel, sick and white, her hands trembling as she supported herself by them. Hare's heart contracted as he looked at her.

"Barbara, this can't go on," he said, harshly. "I'm sorry for you with all my heart, and I hate myself for what I've done to you. But I've got to live with myself and I can't live with you. We have to make an adjustment somehow. I've got to have my freedom."

"I had to send for you," Barbara whispered. "I had to see you again."

"Poor Barbara!" Hare said. "Don't think I'm not sorry! Don't think I've forgotten what your father did for me—all you've given me. I'd rather have hurt any one in the world but you."

"Except yourself," she said, dully.

"Except yourself," he agreed. "I've come to tell you, Barbara," he added, "that I am going away for a while."

"Going away?" she faltered.

"It will be better for us both. Being a doctor, I know how a woman's feelings run. If I'm within ten miles of you you will feel that you must see me. If I'm hundreds of miles away you can't. You'll cure more quickly for knowing I'm out of your life in space as well as—in other ways."

"Going away—but where?"

"Mr. Streeter is ill again, as you know. I'm going to take him up in the foothills."

"But I should think he'd want a nurse," she said, falling into their old habit of discussion.

For a moment he responded to her manner.

"He's a pretty sick man, Barbara. I owe him a lot because he made my work here possible." Then he went on, with a change of tone, "I'd have tried to go with him even if it hadn't been for our—tragedy."

"How long shall you be gone?"

"Besides everything else," he continued, "I'm far from well myself. It hasn't been an easy year for me, either."

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"How long shall you be gone?" she repeated.

"A fortnight—a month—I don't know," he said. "Mr. Streeter needs me doubly, as Miss Streeter will probably not be with him. Her elder sister is ill, and she will doubtless stay with her."

"A fortnight—a month!" she repeated.

"Or even six weeks," he said. "To be frank with you, Barbara, I don't want to see you again. If I can manage my work so as to stay away till after your school term ends here it will be better for us both."

Barbara burst into wild weeping. "Go, if you will," she said, "but, oh, Leonard, try to remember my arms!"

"Barbara, Barbara, if only I could turn pity and respect and admiration into love," he said; "I would do it for my own sake."

She sank to the floor, still bitterly weeping. When she looked up he had gone.

XXIV

AN END AND A BEGINNING

THOUGH Hare had said that he would not write, Barbara looked, day after day, for a letter from him. Surely, after he had left her, he would find that he needed her, after all. Surely, in spite of Helen Farley, in spite of his inability to love deeply, he would learn that Barbara had become a part of his life too vital to relinquish. Perhaps he would be willing to let her love him. She beat her hands together in shame. She had married Rhodes on those terms, and the best she had ever felt for him had been pity. And he had not tried to hold her against her will, as she was ready to hold Hare.

In the stressful days of her marriage with him, some of the nobler and sweeter ideals and impulses which Barbara had known in the mountains had been pushed into the hinterland of her mind. She had been so obsessed with the struggles of her immediate little self that the greater self of which she had been aware when love seemed certain had receded. She had not only not dared to speak to Hare about her dreams of motherhood; she had scarcely dared think of them herself. She had felt in him a distinct avoidance of any topic which would lead to an allusion to children or to home. Thus it was with a shock of surprise, to be followed by an odd sense of inevitableness, that the piercing knowledge came to Barbara that her life belonged no longer simply to Hare and to herself, but that a third life, more insistent than either, was rising out of the strange sea of being.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

She was terrified. She wanted Hare. In those first days of bewilderment and fear, if she could have known where to write to him, she would have sent him a message that would surely have brought him. She went about her daily routine, wondering if the fear that was in her heart was written upon her face. Her pupils and fellow-teachers thought that she had succumbed to the languor that the Californian spring brings. Only Annie Bestor guessed that once more Barbara was suffering from that worst of all illnesses—sickness of the heart.

For several days Barbara scarcely slept at all. She was physically ill, but more than that she was soul-sick with loneliness and shame. It was a time when another woman in her case would have been cherished, would have been building, with her husband, plans and dreams for the new life to be interwoven with their own. But Barbara was deserted; she belonged to a man who had cast her off and would not willingly have joined his fatherhood to her motherhood. One night an unaccustomed drowsiness assailed her. She went early to bed, and slept soundly till midnight. Then she woke with a strange sense of peace.

"I have not thought of Stephen for a long, long time," she said. "He will help me, if I need help—and something else will help me."

She slept once more, and did not awaken till late in the morning. The old sickening misery and longing for Hare did not leap out to meet her. She had a sense now not so much of peace as of strength. She wanted Hare, but no longer in the old way. It was several days before she realized that a change had come over her. The future did not belong either to her or to him; she could not trust it, as he had bidden her. She must shape it. So far as he and she were concerned, she must not make poor terms for herself, because of that other life. The sheltering motherhood had come alive in her even more quickly than it would have come had she been a cherished wife. It was

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

because she had no safety for herself that she must secure the noblest safety for her child.

A month had gone by and Hare had not come or written. Barbara heard through Annie Bestor that Mr. Streeter was fatally ill and that both his daughters had gone to him. She knew that she might glean some news from Helen Farley, but that she could not bring herself to do. There must be an end before long, for her school closed early in May. She took her pride in her hands and went to Annie Bestor.

"Leonard and I have quarreled," she said, with downcast eyes, "irremediably, I think. But I must write him, and I do not know where he is."

"I'll get the address for you," her friend told her, gently.

"And—I can't teach here next year," Barbara said, unsteadily. "I don't know that you'd want me, but I—can't be here."

"You poor child!" Annie Bestor said, tenderly. "I wish I'd kept my blundering old hands out of your affairs. I suppose it's because I'm an irretrievable old maid myself that I'm always trying to couple people. I meant to be good to you, and I've helped hurt you."

"No, no," Barbara said, and she was surprised at the joyous thrill of sincerity in her voice. "No, I'm glad I came; I'm glad!"

The next day Annie Bestor handed her an envelope with Hare's name and address typewritten upon it. Barbara inclosed a letter in it.

DEAR LEONARD [she wrote],—Annie Bestor's school closes next week. I must see you before I go away, and this note is to tell you that I mean to remain here until you come. This is imperative.

Your wife,

BARBARA.

Day after day she waited for a reply, but none came. She had no doubt that the letter had reached him, for

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

she had registered it. Her own stress in sending it had been so great, her sense of the change in the situation so overwhelming, that she forgot to reckon with the fact that to Hare matters must seem to be precisely where they had been before. She felt a cold, sick rage that he had neglected to reply. One day, as if she were a spectator, she watched herself going to the telephone and calling Helen Farley. Her tone was composed and pleasant.

"Can you tell me when Dr. Hare is coming back?" she asked.

"I had a letter yesterday," Helen responded; "he's bringing Mr. Streeter back a week from Thursday; the poor old man wants to die at home. As it is, he seems to feel that Dr. Hare has kept him in the hills too long."

It had been very well planned, Barbara thought. Annie Bestor's school closed on Friday, and Hare thought that in spite of her letter to him she would have given up and be gone by the following Thursday. She expressed a perfunctory regret over Mr. Streeter's sad case, talked of coming soon to see Helen and of her final examinations, and at last escaped. Then she sent a telegram to Hare.

I grant that the experiment is at an end, but I insist on seeing you. I shall expect you Thursday or Friday.

Barbara scarcely knew what she hoped to gain by the meeting. She felt now as if the child belonged to her and not to him. She did not know whether she would tell him of it or not, yet she felt she could not go away without seeing him. She passed the following days in alternations of dull calm and anguished suffering. She went through with her duties adequately, though Annie Bestor guessed that some fresh heartache had befallen her. When Tuesday afternoon came and the last school-girl had said good-by and departed, Barbara drew a long breath of relief. Now she could be alone. That he would come she did not doubt; her demand had been imperative, and at least she absolved him from cowardice,

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

Up to the hour when he came she did not know what she was going to say to him. It was on Thursday afternoon when she heard his step on the stairs; she smiled a little bitterly, guessing that he was afraid to come in the evening. He wanted the broad sunlight, the glaring day-time accessories which would help to separate them. The door was open and he came in slowly. He stood on the threshold, so handsome, so lustrous, but no more real than her memories of him had been. She was almost startled that their experience could have written so little upon his face.

"Let us speak plainly," she said in a hoarse tone.

"Barbara—what more is there to say?" he asked, painfully. "We're both so hurt—"

"Are you hurt, too?" she said, softly.

"Hasn't the dream been dear to me?" he demanded.

"My two dearest dreams have been of work, ever growing greater, and of a woman who would crown the work. Whenever I have lightly loved I have hoped that the dear face I looked into—never dear enough—would grow inestimably precious. I wanted the woman who would make me love her so that I myself would drop into nothingness at her feet."

Barbara looked at him with a kind of cold curiosity. He knew she loved him. Was this, then, a time for him to be talking of his lost hopes?

"Do you know that I love you?" she asked, abruptly.

"Barbara—I—" he stammered.

"Of course you do; perhaps you knew in the mountains. I was dishonest then, if you like, in that I agreed to the assumption that I did not love you, that we were both experimenting."

"Barbara, I'm sorry."

"So am I," she said, dully. "We were both wrong. You made me a very naïve proposition, Leonard."

He winced at that, and she went on:

"Only an unsophisticated person would have done it—"

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

never a man of the world. You may say, and rightly, that I was naïve, too. So I was. I'd had no opportunities to know the world. I didn't know enough of sex and biology to know that I should love you in any case, once I belonged to you; that I should be bound and you would not. You're a doctor; you must have known that only a good woman could have given you such happiness as I did; that only a bad woman could have belonged to you without paying afterward."

"I meant us both to be happy, Barbara," he pleaded.

"Yes, but you must have known that all the risks were on my side. Time and time again I thought you must really love me, but false love has to use the same counters as real love, I suppose. Oh, a woman is a fool when she gives herself as I have done! It's only the real marriage bond that makes her safe. If she isn't safe her nerves go to pieces and she loses confidence—doesn't know how to hold her man—builds up a constraint between them. That's what I've done!"

He felt that he was embarked upon a scene. His master trait, a bourgeois sense of economy, prompted him to save what he could from the wreck and at the least possible cost to his nerves and hers.

"Barbara, this mustn't go on," he said, quietly. "I can only repeat that for your sake as well as mine I must have my freedom."

"I don't want to hold you if you can't love me; I've changed since you deserted me. I'm not pleading," Barbara said.

"Then—" he began, and paused.

"I wanted—I had to see you again—to decide. Perhaps—I thought seeing you again might tell me what to do. I—I only want now to tell you good-by. I shall go away to-morrow, as you knew I should, of course."

"It would only hurt at present if we were to see each other, but, Barbara, I am confident that some day we can be good friends. Nothing that ever happened to

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

me has hurt me as this has. I have thought that the happiest day of my life would be when I held my first child in my arms. But even that day, if it ever comes, will never mean what it might have meant if I had not hurt you."

Barbara looked at him with cool, appraising eyes. Tact was not his strongest quality.

"We can't ever be friends," she said. "It's odd you don't realize that we must be husband and wife or else strangers. Besides, of what avail would friendship be to us, divided by three thousand miles, and with no likelihood of meeting again? There's no use of sentimentality."

"You are so direct, Barbara," he said.

"I dare say. You speak of the day perhaps coming when you may hold your child in your arms. You have said many times that if you couldn't love me you could never love any one."

He dropped his eyes. A sudden suspicion smote Barbara.

"Leonard," she cried, "do you love some one else?"

Hare rose from his chair uncomfortably. "Barbara, I didn't want to tell you this now—" he began, harshly.

"You wanted to wait till I got away a safe distance, when you would write me another letter," Barbara said, chokingly.

"But perhaps we had better have it over," he went on in the same harsh tone. "I am engaged to be married."

"Whom to?"

"Barbara—"

"If you don't tell me to whom," she said, "I'll go to Helen Farley and ask her."

For all her pain and jealousy, she had an exultant sense of power. She had only to tell Hare that their child had asked for its little life, and all the best that was in him would respond to the call of fatherhood. He would not marry any one but the mother of his child.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"I'm going to marry that girl I proposed to once before," he replied.

Barbara broke into harsh peals of laughter. "And yet you told me that that proposal had not engaged your feelings; that two days afterward you wondered what you would have done if she had accepted you. Tell me her name, Leonard."

"It's Lucia Streeter."

Lucia Streeter! Barbara caught her breath. Lucia Streeter, the rich girl! She had never thought who the rich girl might be. Yet she recalled now the slight agitation Hare had shown in the spring when she had mentioned to him that Lucia was engaged to Thornton. So Hare had proposed to the only rich girl he had ever met!

"You—climber!" she said. "You don't love her! You're marrying her for her money!"

"You might remember your birth and breeding, Barbara," Hare said, flushing angrily.

"Women don't when their primitive emotions are involved," Barbara said. "Do you know, Leonard, that you are a cad? You had no right to propose to Lucia Streeter till you had broken ties with me."

"I didn't. I wrote you before I spoke to her."

"You may be able to deceive yourself, Leonard, though I doubt it, but you certainly can't deceive me. You were making love to her up in the mountains, or she'd not have stood ready to accept you. All the time when I was eating my heart out for a word from you, a single line, you were making love to her."

He kept his eyes on the ground.

"Have you told her the truth—that you are married?" Barbara asked.

"I— In a general way she knows that I am not free—that it will perhaps be some months before I can ask her to marry me—"

"You begged her to trust you, I suppose?" Barbara said, wearily. "I wonder if you didn't say that it would

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

be some months before you could *honorably* ask her to marry you?"

He flushed deeply.

"Don't you see what a—what you're like?" Barbara said. "You have not been loyal either to the woman you are taking on or to the one you are casting off. I love you, Leonard, but, indeed, I despise you."

"Barbara, you cannot mean all the hard things you are saying to me. Why need we part in anger? We've been so happy together—"

"Sit down, Leonard," Barbara said in a calm voice. "I want to look at you and think about you."

She stared at him with cool attentiveness. In her life there had been very few men—her brother, Rhodes, Thornton, Hare. Slowly she measured Hare by each of the others. They had all been gentlemen born and bred, and he had not; they had all been gentlemen in heart and soul, and he was not. They would not have let her take the risk Hare had urged upon her; they would have protected her against themselves. She should have known that a man of Hare's consuming ambition would not have had room in his soul for an unselfish love. He had always tried to buy cheap and sell dear, and in any travel into the fields of emotion he had always left himself wide roads for retreat. He had always cared for money and position; he had tried to get money through Lucia Streeter. When she had rejected him, and he had been thrown with Barbara in the Sierras, he had remembered that she was a Virginia Langworthy. He had thought, too, that she would inherit Grassmere. All along he had protected his own peace and risked her happiness. He had called their dream an idyl, but he had always treated it as an episode.

"What is it, Barbara?" Hare said, uneasy under her stare, which had become unseeing. "Are you ill?"

"I am thinking," Barbara said, slowly, "that you are not fit to be a father. The woman that would intrust her child to your bringing up, who would set before it your

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

ideals, would be wronging it. I will ask you to go, now, while I still have the strength to send you. At this moment I have no love for you and I do have scorn for you. The love will come back, but so will the scorn. Some day I shall be fully free from you."

She rose. He saw that she was withdrawn and contemptuous. Just a little while before, he had felt himself a man with a successful, if not radiant, future; secure in his work, secure in his future wife's wealth and in his marriage to a placid woman who would ask little of him, who would not make him pay for her money. All that lay between him and his future was the pain of putting Barbara out of his life. She had accepted his dismissal and had given him hers. But her dismissal was leaving him strangely reluctant, was making him feel again like "little Leonard Hare."

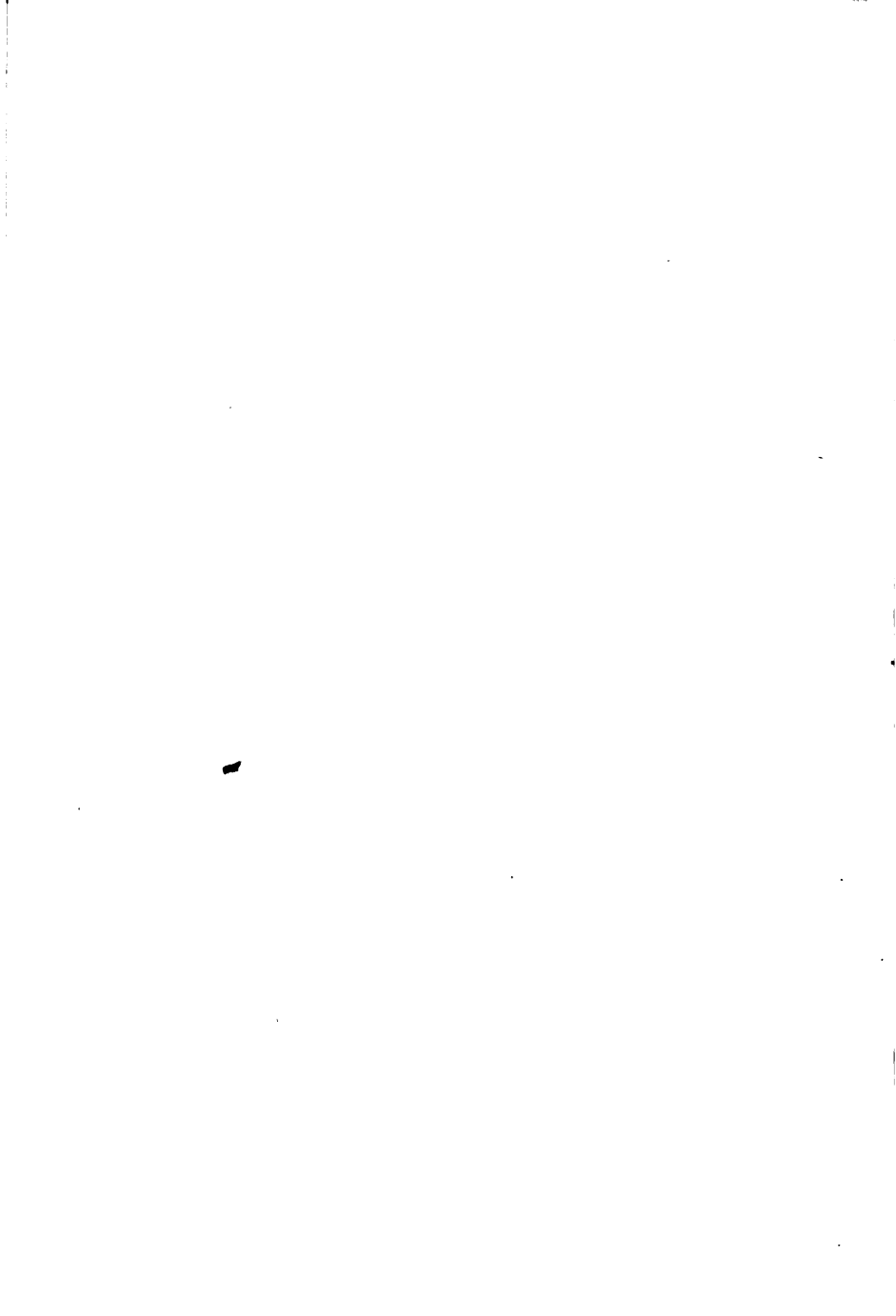
"Barbara," he pleaded, "won't you say that you forgive me?"

"You're sentimental, Leonard," she said. "Strange, when you are so hard."

She looked at him again, steadily and curiously. Then a sudden passion of longing clouded her eyes. She put her hands before them, and went blindly into the little bedroom. Hare looked after her undecidedly; then with a gesture of helplessness and irritation he went out, softly closing the door after him.

Part IV

PAY



XXV

TRUSTING THE FUTURE

A FIERCE rain was sweeping about the little station when Barbara dismounted from the train. Her heavy black veil shrouded her face from the old station-master who had known her all her life. He apologized for the lack of a carriage, saying that young 'Thias Langworthy, who drove it nowadays, had gone home because he was sure no one would be out on such a night. Barbara murmured something, and when he saw her go in the direction of the village he assumed that she would soon be housed.

Once clear of his eyes, Barbara struck across a vacant field and took the long red road that led to Grassmere. The wind and rain beat so heavily in her face that she had much ado to keep her feet. She remembered that it had been in just such a storm that Thornton's case had been decided against him, and that she had come upon him walking, head down, as she was now walking, beaten and depressed. It all seemed so long ago, and yet she could almost count on the fingers of one hand the months that had passed. What was much more vivid and present with her was her life with Hare, which had meant so much to her, and which was now for ever over.

Her one idea, after they had parted, had been to get away. She did not want to see Annie Bestor, nor Helen Farley, nor any one associated in any way with Hare. She had gone to San Francisco and had consulted a good lawyer about her divorce. When she had told him fully

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

all the circumstances it was decided that she had better make the charge of unfaithfulness; it would not be necessary to introduce Helen Farley's name, and if Hare did not contest the suit the case could very soon be disposed of. The lawyer had written Hare, who had returned a brief reply which showed Barbara that the suit would be uncontested. The decree was entered in an unbelievably short time, thanks to a relatively clear docket in the courts; and, thanks to some vital national news, it had practically no mention in the newspapers.

A free woman, Barbara repacked her trunk and took the train. But the rolling of the wheels repeated itself in her head until she thought that she should go mad unless she could get to some quiet place. She had got off the train at the little way-station which led to Lake Tahoe. She had gone up there and, though the season had not begun, she had found a place to board. Day after day she had sat by the blue waters, looking at the shimmering distant hills, remembering the hours when she had sat there wondering if she should accept the idyl Hare offered. She kept looking back, though she told herself that she must look forward. The past was gone, and the future that was to have been hers and his was now to be hers and her child's.

The one thing clear to her was that she must live for the child. Her loyalty to her motherhood was too keen to admit of regret that the little one had called to her. She knew that she had been weak and paltering in her clinging, demanding love for Hare. She had depended on him; had felt that she could not live without him. But now the new life was dependent on her, and she answered to its need. She could be brave, when the time came, for her child's sake. But for the present she felt too ill and sad to struggle.

After some days she had felt the impulse to take the train again, to leave Lake Tahoe as she had left Los Angeles. She had an idea that the farther she was

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

removed from Hare the farther she would be removed from grief. She had instinctively turned to her old home; she had come back to it clad in the black that she had worn to Anita's funeral, and as she struggled through the heavy mud of the red road she would, except for her child, have envied Anita, lying at rest beside Gilbert.

A ragged flash of lightning showed her the fallen sycamore where she had so often sat as a girl. She entered the open gate and toiled up the drive between the dripping myrtles. The house seemed very dark. She could not see a light anywhere, and the servants' quarters were still and black. It had not occurred to Barbara that Grassmere might be untenanted. She climbed the steps wearily and felt for the knocker. She could not remember a time when the door had not opened at her touch. She knocked heavily once and twice, but no answer came. She tried again. Then she heard steps on the driveway, and she shrank behind a pillar. She saw a man approaching; he mounted the steps and, hearing her slight, startled movement, called, sharply:

"Who is there?"

"Stephen!" cried Barbara, with a sob of thankfulness.

"Oh, Stephen, is it you?"

"Barbara, my dear!" he exclaimed. "What in the world! Wait till I unlock the place."

He drew a key from his pocket, opened the door, and led her inside. The close, musty air told Barbara that the house had been shut up for some time.

"You know, I'm just back," Thornton explained. "I got my medical diploma yesterday. I've been writing you all about it, but I've not heard from you lately."

"No," she said, monotonously.

"I know where the hall lamp is. Just a moment. . . ." He lighted a bracket-lamp, and then, holding it, he turned and looked at Barbara. "Good God! What has happened, Barbara? Sit down! Come to the library; a fire is laid there."

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

He led her into the library, took off her hat and coat, and put her in Gilbert's great arm-chair. He knelt at the hearth and set the wood blazing. Then he turned and took off her muddy, wet shoes. She submitted passively, gazing absently at the mounting flames of the fire.

"I'm going into the dining-room," he said. He came back in a few minutes with a cup of tea and some sandwiches cut in thick, man-like fashion. "I brought some bread and meat in my pocket from the village," he said, "and I had other supplies here. I knew I couldn't get hold of any servants for a day or two. Now drink this while I go off again."

She took the tea passively, listening to his movements as he went up and down stairs and passed across the floor over her head. He came down again and said:

"Now I'm the doctor. I've lighted a fire in your old room and got some sheets airing. In a few minutes I'm going to leave you and get Sissy from the village. She'll take care of you. You're to stay here, and I'll live in the village and look after you."

Barbara aroused herself with an effort. "You mustn't sweep me off my feet, dear Stephen," she said, "though it is very sweet to be taken care of. It seems a long time since any one—" Her voice broke; then she steadied it and went on: "I've been thinking all the way what I must do. I came to you because there is not any one else I felt I could turn to. I need your help. I failed you in going away—"

"No, you didn't, Barbara," Thornton said. "A man can't lean on a woman; he's got to hew his own road. Your letters were wonderful; they gave me all the help I needed. I owe you far more than you can owe me. I'll not forget how you stood by me in the trial. It was you who gave me the idea of taking up medicine again and building a reputation here in the place where I'd lost it. Besides, I'm living like a thief in your Grassmere. You shall have it."

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"No, Stephen. I'm beginning to think I am a very wicked woman all around," Barbara said, with a feeble smile, "but my conscience would not let me take Grassmere."

She reminded him of how she had meant to cheat Anita into not leaving Grassmere to Alison Peters, and of how ironically that left-handed action would, except for accident, have reacted upon herself. She could only salve her conscience, she told him, by seeing him for ever the owner of Grassmere.

"But all that isn't why I am here," she said, wearily. "Stephen, when I went away last autumn—"

"I know why you went away," he said, gently. "You loved Hare; you wanted to be near him."

"There was a secret marriage, Stephen," she said with effort. "He was going to try to love me. I know it sounds preposterous as I tell it, yet it seemed to come about naturally. Ah, well, Stephen, I loved him, and I hoped he'd learn to love me—not to be able to live without me. But it's ended; we're divorced. He could not love me."

"He's a beast," Thornton said, with clenched teeth, "or else a fool. At the bottom of his heart every man knows that a woman, if she's a nice woman, the kind a decent man wants to love—such a woman can't play that game the man's way. She's bound to be hurt."

"Somehow I like you to say that, but I don't think he's quite a cad, though I told him he was," Barbara said. "Only—there is to be—"

"Good God!" muttered Thornton. "Have you told him?"

"No," Barbara said.

"But don't you see that this will change everything for him?"

"Why should it?" said Barbara, defiantly.

"Don't you know what fatherhood means to a man?"

"It should mean no more than husbandhood," she said.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"But a child has to bear its father's name," protested Thornton.

"Any more than a woman needs her husband's? No, Stephen," she cried, "he sha'n't have my child, but it's not from spite because he does not love me. It's because, though I love him, I don't respect him. I don't want him to share in the responsibility of bringing up my baby. Better no father than a father who has a cheap soul, a cold heart."

"You don't look at things as the world does, Barbara," he said.

"I know that. The world would think I was a bad woman for entering into that—but I know I wasn't. I was a fool, if you like, but no worse. The world would think I was a fool and worse for insisting that my child shall have life. I know that since Leonard doesn't love me, and since he's the man he is, he and I could never make the right home for my baby." She spoke passionately. Then she sank back wearily. "Don't let me wear myself out struggling with you, Stephen," she said. "Help me in the way I must be helped."

"I will, Barbara," he said, pitifully. "Oh, my dear, I will!"

"I don't even ask you if you are shocked," she said, with a little smile.

"I'm thirty-seven, Barbara, and I've done some thinking on my own hook. If a man takes one person's life and looks it over carefully—a life like Cousin Sophia Langrel's, for instance, he won't be too ready to make decisions for other people."

He did not tell her the real emotion she was inspiring in him—a worshiping respect for her sense of motherhood. As yet it was but the implication of full motherhood. So far Barbara had felt, not love for her child, but loyalty to it, deference to its rights. But because motherhood was to become the supreme passion of her life, already she was its servitor, already her hands were firm to light her fires

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

before that selfless shrine that sends its steady glow down the infinite road of the ages.

"To-morrow," Thornton said, rising—"to-morrow we can make all necessary plans. Go up-stairs now, Barbara, and try to sleep. Fear nothing, for I'll have Sissy in her cabin inside of an hour. You won't be alone."

"You're so good," she murmured.

Barbara entered the yellow room which had long been hers with the sense of coming back to some safe refuge. The ugly walls, the hideous carpet, were disguised under the tender associations of home. She lay looking at the firelight, inert, at peace, with little thought now of Hare. She listened to the stormy symphony of wind and rain, but it spoke to her only of safe shelter. After a time she heard the sound of wheels in the yard, and knew that Thornton was still taking care of her. Then she slept.

When Thornton returned to Grassmere, late in the morning, Barbara was just coming down-stairs, a little figure in black, one white hand slipping softly along the banister. It was a picture that he never forgot, that never failed to summon implications of solemnity and of beauty.

"Good morning, honey," he said, heartily. "Everything going well?"

"Yes," she responded, with a faint smile. "Sissy served me the breakfast I've always had just as if she'd done it yesterday. It seems like home."

"That's good," he said. "Where shall we sit?"

"In Gilbert's smoking-den," Barbara decided, "precisely because I've never sat there and because everything's going to begin over."

"That's true, Barbara," he said, following her to the little room where Gilbert's smoking-jacket still hung, and where his pipes lay upon the mantelpiece.

"By the way," Thornton said, after they were seated, "I had a letter from Lucia this morning—the first since we parted. She says she's going to marry Hare."

"Yes," Barbara replied. "Perhaps I ought to have told

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

you last night. But I wanted to spare you the knowledge till you had to have it."

"You've spared me nothing," he said, quietly. "It doesn't hurt. I can't tell you how it came about, Barbara, for I'm not very good at analyzing. All I can say is that about January, when I was mugging over my medical books, I woke up one morning to the realization that I hadn't thought of Lucia for days. She had passed out of my life as completely as poor Cousin Sophia."

He did not mention that Lucia had fallen in his esteem because she had known that Anita was going to leave Grassmere to him and had not told him, obviously because she knew he would protest against disinheriting Barbara.

"Perhaps I did not care for her deeply enough," he went on, "and perhaps I did care, but the smash of my work blotted everything out. The fact remains that I need no sympathy on that score."

"I'm glad you're not hurt," she said.

"That clears the way, in part, for a proposition I have to make," Thornton went on, in a practical tone. "I want you to marry me, Barbara. We've both been shipwrecked in a way, and we've got a chance to start over. We both love Grassmere. You can be of great help to me in building up a practice, and perhaps I can help you—"

Barbara lifted to him eyes shining with tears. "Stephen, it's just like you," she said. "But it wouldn't do. For one thing, we don't love each other."

"No, Barbara," he said, "of course you can't love me. I don't love you, but I'm fonder of you than I am of any one else, and I'd always be loyal."

"It's clear to me," Barbara said, slowly, "that it's not fair to enter into such a relation unless there's love on both sides. Mr. Rhodes loved me, and I didn't love him; I loved Leonard, and he didn't love me; both affairs went wrong. No satisfactory outcome could have resulted."

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"You know," he said, gravely, "that all I propose is friendship under a guise that would protect you from the world."

"That's just your chivalry, Stephen," she said, her eyes dim; "but I cannot accept the sacrifice you offer. Remember you may meet the woman you can love far better than you ever loved Lucia Streeter."

"Not if I don't let myself look for her," he returned. "There's nothing in this talk of sacrifice. Besides, it would straighten out the matter of Grassmere. But, after all, Barbara, it isn't entirely a question of you and me. There's the child. He needs a name and a home."

"Yes," she said, slowly. "But, Stephen, he needs a mother who has proved to herself that she isn't a weakling any more."

"You aren't that, Barbara. Look at the years you put in with Anita."

"It's just those years that deceived me about myself," she said. "It wasn't easy to live with poor Anita and be reproached and insulted every day of my life. I thought I was strong and big because I did it. I told myself that I was spending my youth, giving up all my chances of happiness to pay my debt to her. The truth is that I never was tempted. I was frozen up; I never had any chances at youth or happiness till last summer. I was tempted then, and you see how I met the test."

"You met it well enough, Barbara."

"The mistake I made," she said, "was in judging Leonard by his outside. If I hadn't followed my feelings so quickly, if I'd probed him more deeply, I'd have found out that he wasn't big enough for such a partnership as I risked. There are a few men in the world—there must be! and yet, the whole proposal was so selfish. I ought to have seen that I lost everything from the day I yielded. I held myself too cheap; I needed him, and I paid an inordinate price for the losing chance of winning him."

"You are too hard on yourself," Thornton told her.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"No, Stephen. And then, from the time I went West I really knew that I had lost, but I stayed on, hoping against hope. Again that was weak. I've got to learn to be strong for my baby's sake."

"Oh, my dear, you are strong enough! You were strong when you didn't tell him about the child."

"Yes, I think I was," she agreed. "But that was only a momentary gleam of strength. That I came away immediately was my only safeguard. I should have told him, had I stayed. Seeing you, knowing that I could depend on you, has clarified matters for me, Stephen."

"I recognize that you must keep well and strong, physically and mentally, for the sake of the child," Thornton said, a trifle impatiently. "But there are practical matters to be settled; the child has something besides a spiritual future."

"You mean that we must keep any stigma of disgrace from it," Barbara said, steadily. "Yes, I know that."

"I was thinking rather of its birth and—and money matters," he said.

"That, too. Some day I want to work again, but not at first. I want my baby to have its mother's care for some years. Last night I solved it. I was rather worrying because I have only five thousand dollars left of Mr. Rhodes's money. And then I remembered the jewelry."

"The jewelry?"

"Yes; perhaps you didn't know, for I never wear it. I couldn't wear those beautiful necklaces even when I wanted Leonard's love most. He's never seen them. Somehow I felt it wouldn't be loyal to that big love Mr. Rhodes gave me to wear those jewels as a lure. But I can sell them for my baby."

"Have you any idea of their value?"

"Perhaps eighty thousand dollars," she said. "The emerald necklace alone must be worth twenty thousand. Then there are pearls and diamonds. Mr. Rhodes said something about the value once. I never told Anita."

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"But, honey, you'll be quite independent!" Thornton cried. "No need ever to teach, if I can sell those jewels to advantage, as of course I can."

"I believe Mr. Rhodes would want to help me in this way," Barbara said. "I seem to appreciate and understand his love as I never did before."

"I'm glad about the money," Thornton said. "But now, Barbara, there are months ahead when you'll need care, sympathy—"

"Care, yes; sympathy, no," Barbara said. "I want to go off alone to some wholesome, beautiful place, and wait. I don't want any one to know—"

"You'd better go abroad," Thornton said. "You can let this woman you call Annie Bestor, and any other friends you have, think you're over there studying languages for a year or two. Write to them now and then; you can have your mail sent to some London or continental bank. I've got some doctor friends over there, and we can easily arrange the hospital side of it."

Barbara silently assented.

"Barbara, it's going to be so hard for you all alone," he said. "Won't you marry me?"

She shook her head. "All that one friend can take from another I'll take from you, Stephen," she said, "but not that. Don't be afraid for me. I muddled my own life, but then it was only mine. I won't muddle yours, and I dare not fail my baby."

The passion of motherhood was in her eyes. He knew it to be greater than his force of persuasion. Again he felt a humility of worship for her ideal, and very gently he took her hand in his.

"Barbara, I honor you beyond all women," he said.

She smiled, but her eyes were beyond him, looking into that future which Hare had told her to trust and which no longer belonged to him or to herself.

XXVI

GILBERT LANGWORTHY

"TO make the most of each minute," Barbara wrote Thornton, "one dare not think of the many minutes to come nor of the many minutes just passed."

She came no nearer complaint than that; all her struggles were silent. As soon as the necessary arrangements could be made she had gone abroad. Upon Thornton's advice she had passed June in London, one of a party of tourists with whom she had set sail. He said that sight-seeing would give her at least surface distraction. Barbara spent most of her time wandering through the aisles of Westminster Abbey or sitting in the cloister, looking at the quiet old walls. There were moments when sharp, searing agony shook her spirit as she thought of Hare, whom she had lost for ever; but for the most part she felt no resistance, no blame; she poured herself into the gray old stones about her, felt living there a multitude of lives beside which her own seemed unreal or of no import.

Toward the end of the month she left her companions and went to Canterbury. Body and soul were greedy for peace; she could absorb it, become a part of it, among the dignified arches and immemorial aspirations of the old cathedral. It was here that she first felt her child speak to her, not as an idea, but as a creature of flesh and blood and movement. From that moment the courage that Barbara was only pretending, only borrowing, became real and wholly hers. And with courage came a sense of possible joy, of fresh youth — youth no longer for

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

its own sake, but for the sake of her baby. The world, which had been but a sober, straight-walled path, along which she should lead her child, became a place where beauty and adventure were again possible.

Sometimes when she was sitting outside the cathedral, staring dreamily at an ivy-clothed wall, she would get a vision of the physical beauty of the world. She would hear soft rain falling in the woods; a calm river running between lilies and reeds, to pour itself joyously into the salt sea. She would see a flock of home-going sheep in the twilight, or a herd of young horses galloping with elastic hoofs over a green meadow. She would catch the silver gleam of fish which sunbrowned fishermen pulled out of their deep bed. She would realize a changing physical world, full of perpetual beauty—a bed of scarlet poppies beside a green bank, the Blue Ridge Mountains against an azure sky, the thunderous beat of the sea against a rocky shore, Piccadilly Circus under its lights at nine o'clock; and always it was a setting for her and her child.

Often she thought of what she must become for the sake of the child. It must discover in her no frivolity or passion of which it could make use. To it she would mean providence and law; it would respect strength and disdain weakness. She clung to this thought when her spirit failed, and when she remembered that she was facing pain and danger alone, with no one to share the tedium of waiting, and no one to rejoice with her when it should be past. Then it was that she read over and over the daily letters that Thornton wrote her, for not one but carried some message that inspired bravery and hope.

As the summer passed and the sense of her child's being grew stronger, she became more anxious to preserve it from any shadow of shame or suspicion. In the beginning it had seemed most important that she fit herself to be its mother; spiritual power, the inner life, had seemed everything. Now she could no longer deny the force of the world's judgment. So far as she was concerned, she

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

could let the truth be known, and go through the world with her head high because she had been sincere, if mistaken. Yet the child must be protected. In such a mood a letter from Thornton suggested a plan.

"How should you like," he wrote, "to go to the Shetland Islands, toward the end? I know an old doctor there who is a most noble savior of bodies and souls. Some day I will tell you of the shame which drove him there, and which he has turned to honor. His sister, who lives with him, has been a trained nurse. With him you would get the best of care. No question would be asked you, no chance stranger or islander need see you. You would be lost, and when you came away it would be as if you had never been there. It's a stern, brave country. Think of it, Barbara."

Thus it was that early in August Barbara went to the island of Mid-Yell. When she landed, one twilight, at a little gray, rain-swept pier at the foot of a low, treeless hill, it seemed to her that she had come to the most desolate corner of the world. But when a tall, white-haired old man in oilskins, who looked more like a sailor than a doctor, came forward and took her hand in his, she had a sense of home-coming.

"You are my patient," he said, "and I shall take you home to food and warmth."

He led her on his arm past two or three fishermen, and a tall, gaunt woman with a shawl over her head who always came to the pier in the hope that her lost son would return. His bones were swaying on the floor of the North Sea, but he lived in his mother's heart. The doctor drove his rough little pony up a rocky road to a stone house on the breast of the hill. The windows twinkled with lights and the door stood wide. The doctor's white-haired sister, silent, but welcoming, too, led Barbara in and gave her the first sense of home rights she had felt since her parents had died and Anita had won Grassmere.

Barbara felt as if she had come to the top of the world.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

It was not that the Shetland hills were very high, but they were hard to climb, and to have reached a summit meant a sense of conquest. She looked over the dark, green, sloping hills, and down upon the two seas, like one who beheld the world from a vast distance. While she was still able to walk easily she liked to go from a point where the Atlantic tides swept in to a point where the North Sea tides swept out. Now and then she met the islanders, tall, blue-eyed, quiet-faced people. Their strength and gravity impressed her deeply, the more so when she came to understand that it was born of their age-long contest with the sea. For centuries they and theirs had lived against the challenge of the winds and waves, and always they had paid toll in lives and in sorrow. They knew more of toil and grief than of luxury and joy, but their faith in God rose serene above all rebellion.

Walking in the winds, listening to the crash of the waves, and to the wild minor cries of the sea-gulls, Barbara felt that her old life was very far away. She could not have had stancher or nobler preparation for her child than in this solemn, still island, where all that was petty or selfish lost itself in the big inescapable forces of nature. In the evening, when twilight gathered down, she sat by the turf-fire in the kitchen and listened to the stories of the island the doctor's sister told her—quiet records mostly, but lit up with sudden, tragic, epical flashes.

In these last weeks, too, Barbara seemed to come closer to Thornton. Living as she was, with few accessories to confuse her, she had a clarity of vision about him and his course of life. He and Hare had both begun with consuming ambition. Hare had realized his; Thornton had lost his through the operation of blind chance. Yet he had gone about the reconstruction of his life alone, and stern-souled, with a singleness of purpose that Hare could not have reached. Barbara guessed from Thornton's letters, as much as by what he neglected to say, how hard his struggle was.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

Langrel had intrenched his position by marrying a middle-aged woman of good family and numerous relatives, thus raising up a fresh host of questioners of Thornton's integrity. It was clear to Barbara that the county was still making him suffer social ostracism. The little fat Dr. Lewis resented Thornton's intrusions on his practice; he had been almost ready to retire, but his indignation had given him a renewed thirst for work. Thornton wrote that his practice lay chiefly among the mountaineers, who suspected him and only came when their sick were almost beyond help, and at that had no money. But in whatever mood he wrote, humorous or satirical or half bitter, Barbara could see that his poor patients were taking hold on his sympathies, and that his idea of succeeding in medicine, as he had in law, was being unconsciously absorbed in an intention of high service. He told her how much her letters meant to him, and she realized that their friendship was a far more vital thing than it had been in the years when they were living side by side.

In October, when the harsh weather came, and at night the wild winds seemed ready to sweep the roof from over her, Barbara fell into a mood of loneliness and terror. She felt the price she was paying, and nothing of the reward. She cried out passionately against Hare, pursuing his tranquil, amiable way with Lucia Streeter while she was suffering alone for the life of their child. But toward the end a stolid, desperate courage came to her. There couldn't be many days more. If she lived she would take care of her baby; and if she died Thornton would not fail it. The white-haired doctor and his sister guarded her, unobtrusively, and she never guessed the anxiety with which the old man answered any call that came to him from the remote end of the island.

Early one November evening Barbara awakened with a wrench of intolerable pain. It was exactly a year before that she had left Grassmere to go to Hare. She lay

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

thinking of all that had befallen her until once more the pain shocked her out of any power of thought. She called the doctor's sister, and learned that he had gone to see a sick fisherman at the northern end of the island, but would return early in the afternoon. There would be plenty of time. Barbara, breathless, resented the easiness of the phrase. The hours went on in what seemed to her purposeless suffering that could accomplish nothing. When the doctor returned, time and space meant nothing to Barbara. The world had changed into a black haze of struggle and anguish. She could not have said where she was, or whether it was night or day, when a sudden quiet and peace fell upon her. Out of the black haze there sounded a quick, sharp cry, piercing as a flash of light.

Somewhere on the top of the world, where the two seas flung their tides back and forth, Barbara knew that there were a woman and a child who somehow belonged to each other. She could not see, for her eyelids seemed weighed down, and what she heard sounded like a roar of wind and of flame, but she stretched out her arms to try to bring that mother and child together. Some one took her hands, but she freed herself feebly, still stretching out her arms. Then some one laid a heavy weight on her arm. The weight became a soft little head, and Barbara said, clearly, "This is my son."

Then she slept. When she woke it was an accomplished fact with her that she was the mother of Gilbert Langworthy. She did not tell the doctor or his sister what the child was to be called; that reticence was part of their silent compact. There came a day or two of weakness when she would have been glad to take him and herself into an eternal blackness; but when he first began to draw his life from her veins, then she knew to the full the pride of motherhood achievement; she had borne a man-child.

Barbara had meant to leave Mid-Yell as soon as she could travel with safety. Yet she found herself strangely

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

reluctant to go. She and little Gilbert were safe here among these good people who asked her no questions and gave ungrudging love and service. When she went out into the world again there would be the need for explanations and pretense. So she stayed on, sharing with the doctor's sister the wonders of Gilbert's first smile, of his marvelous discovery of his hands and his feet, of the little cooing sounds he made, and of his crowning achievement of sitting up. One night, when the spring days had come, she said to her friends:

"I meant to pass out of your lives entirely, but I can't do that. I shall bring him back to you often. This is his first home."

They made no reply, and Barbara realized how much silence had gone into the communion of all three of them. These two she could trust with the baby's future only a little less fully than she would trust herself.

Toward August she prepared to go. Thornton had been asking when he might come to see her and Gilbert. Annie Bestor had written to know where she was. The world in which little Gilbert must live was calling to him. Barbara thought she would spend the winter in England, but she would make no plans till she saw Thornton. He wrote that he could scarcely come until September, for little Dr. Lewis was on his vacation and the community could not be left without some physician.

Barbara had come to love the sea, and she chose to spend August in a little Welsh resort where the milk-supply was good, and where Gilbert could still have the tang of the salt air to which he was accustomed. He was a beautiful, sturdy child, able to creep, and already making vain efforts to stand and speak. He had a number of mysterious sounds which Barbara repeated after him to his immense pleasure; their communication, so far as he was concerned, was eminently satisfactory.

One warm noon she lay with him on a steamer rug, rolling him over and over to the edge of the sand. The

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

blue parasol which was to shade their eyes had dipped away. Gilbert had torn Barbara's bright brown hair from its moorings. She heard a step in the distance, and she sat up hastily.

"Wait, you badling," she admonished him, happily. "This is the road the walking tourists take from Llandudno. We must look respectable."

She adjusted her hair and restrained the baby from adventuring upon the sands. As the steps which had aroused her came nearer she looked up casually. She saw Leonard Hare. For a moment she stared at him incredulously; then she seized little Gilbert with an instinctive gesture of denial.

"Barbara!" cried Hare. Then he understood, retrospectively, the significance of her gesture. "Barbara," he said in a raucous tone, "whose child is that?"

She held the baby to her bosom and faced him proudly. "Mine," she said; "only mine!"

XXVII

A STRUGGLE

BARBARA and Hare faced each other on the Welsh sands—they who had once been so close had never been farther apart than at that moment when they stood together, their child between them.

"Your child?" Hare repeated. "That child is yours?"

He looked at Barbara's cold face, and then at the little, lustrous face of Gilbert. The likeness to himself was undeniable. "Our child," he stammered. "But when—how—"

The baby smiled at him and stretched out its arms. Jealously Barbara shifted the child so that his back would be to Hare. Nothing that had ever been done to him hurt like that refusal.

"Barbara," he said, with an intensity of feeling he had never before shown to her, "you had no right to leave me as you did without telling me about my child. You owed me that."

"I—leave you!" cried Barbara, bitterly. "I wonder at you, with the memory of your last words in my ears. I wonder at you for talking to me of right and of wrong. You loved me in play, and when it came to the call of the world you left me in bitter earnest."

"If I had known," he said, "it would have changed everything."

"Would it have changed your feelings for me?" asked Barbara, contemptuously.

"There would have been no question of your feelings

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

or of mine," Hare replied. "There would have been the question only of our parenthood. You wronged me when you took away from me the right of fatherhood."

"Oh, but I'm glad the law says differently. You made me suffer such pain—I can't tell you of it. I do forgive you. I forgave you when Gilbert was born, but I can't forget. No one has told you what it is to bear a child alone—to go through dreadful months, with the man whose right it is to cherish you not caring, not knowing—" Her voice broke; then she went on, steadily: "But it made Gilbert doubly mine. My boy doesn't need the father who didn't love his mother."

"Barbara," Hare said, "if you think I haven't known remorse—"

Gilbert began to cry, and Barbara soothed him.

"You see, he's never heard any voices like this," she said. "I think you'd better go on, please."

Hare did not appear to have heard her. "Barbara," he said, diffidently, "I am—I am a free man. Lucia Streeter threw me over a few months ago. She never really got over caring for Thornton. It's not too late. I've treated you shabbily, but if you'll marry me now I'll spend the rest of my life trying to atone."

"But I don't love you, Leonard," she said in a tone half surprised, half cold. "I don't know just when it came about, but so it is."

"It isn't for myself or yourself I'm asking it," Hare said, humbly. "The child needs a name, and a man to help you bring him up."

"Oh, you couldn't help me bring him up, Leonard," said Barbara, softly.

He understood; her child must have the best, and he was not the best.

"I'm punished," he said, humbly. Then, for humility sat ill on his soul and he was tenacious, he added: "Could you not give me some hope for the future, Barbara? Is there nothing I could do—"

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"No, Leonard," she said, decisively. "My boy and I can never be in your life. In years to come, if you should ever be thrown with him naturally, I'll not try to separate you. If you can ever win him, you shall. But you cannot be his father."

Her tone was final. With all his feeling Hare refused to accept the finality.

"It can't be, Barbara. I'm not the man I was. People do change. I don't pretend to give you the love that you would be capable of giving. But I've missed you—unbelievably! I've wished with all my heart that we had never parted. Now, with the child between us—"

She shook her head, with misty eyes. How many times she had dreamed that he would come to her with such words! And now, when he was saying all that she had ever hoped to hear, the words came too late.

"I'm sorry, Leonard," she said, gently. "It can't be; it's too late. I never think of you as the baby's father."

He walked away a pace, then over his shoulder he said to her: "This won't do. I must come to see you."

"No, no. I'm going away," she called after him.

Barbara had met some people who were going north for the shooting and who rented their Surrey house to her for the autumn. She meant to wait there until Thornton came. He had written her that he should be somewhat delayed by a tragedy at home—Mary Thornton and her husband had died together in an accident, and he had taken their little boy. Sissy was looking after him until Thornton could make more suitable arrangements. Barbara was glad that after thirty years there should once more be a child in Grassmere.

She watched Hare walking away with bent head, so rapidly that he seemed to be running, and she called after him that she was leaving the hotel that afternoon. He did not turn; she was sure that he had not heard her. She told herself that she had no intention of running away from him, yet she went back to her rooms and set the

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

nurse to packing, saying that she meant to take an earlier train than she had at first planned. Until the carriage came for them she started at every sound in the hall outside her door, and even when she was in the train she looked about uneasily, as if at the last moment she expected Hare to swoop down upon them and distress her with fresh insistence.

But once she was settled in the long, low house in Surrey, the nervousness she had felt at the sudden meeting with him passed away. Every day she and little Gilbert sat in the faint autumn sunshine, watching the Surrey roads change from green to gold. Sometimes she was very definitely aware that she was waiting for Thornton, and again she was conscious only that she was living every hour with her child. Since she had seen Hare, Gilbert seemed more than ever hers. She thought a good deal of Hare, and usually with pity. Whatever bitterness she had felt toward him had gone out for ever in that short interview when the knowledge of his forfeited fatherhood had come to him so suddenly and so blightingly.

His love for children was his finest characteristic. If she had wanted revenge, surely she had it. But Barbara did not want revenge; she would have spared him the knowledge of his retribution if she could. Things simply worked themselves out, she reflected, and there was no use trying to change the course of the inevitable. Given their agreement to enter into the idyl, it was, considering their temperaments, inevitable that she should care for him more than ever, and that he should care less for her. It was temperament and chance which made any two people mates, and both temperament and chance had failed her and Hare. And from the wreck of their association it was she who had come off well, for she had Gilbert.

She thought often of the unreasonable proportions into which life frequently shapes events. She had spent long months in grief over her losing fight for Hare's love, and yet more months of alternating misery and joy, strength

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

and weakness, while she was waiting for her child. Her realization of the meaning of her experience had been slow, unspectacular, a drama of feeling. Hare's realization had been sudden and dramatic, occupying but a few minutes, and yet she knew that those few minutes had changed his life as inevitably as the long months had changed hers. Because of Gilbert she had come to forget Hare; he meant no more to her now than any stranger, for the child had claimed all the love that had once gone to the father. But because of Gilbert she knew that Hare must remember her for ever. The idyl which with his dwindling feeling became an episode had now become a permanent tale of loss. To her the idyl had first been a tragedy, and now was a blessed, wholesome book of daily living, of which she would thankfully turn the pages to the hour when her hands stilled for ever.

One day she and Gilbert were playing, after luncheon, under a great yew-tree, when a sudden shadow fell between them and the pale afternoon sun. Barbara looked up to see Hare. She whitened perceptibly.

"Oh, why have you come?" she cried.

He sat down beside her. "Barbara, why did you run away?" he asked. "I went to the hotel, and they told me you had gone, leaving no address. I've spent every moment since tracing you."

"Leonard," she said, gently, "it's no use, indeed."

She wondered, with a half-whimsical smile, at the irony of the situation. Hare was pursuing her as persistently now as she had once clung to him, and as hopelessly.

"I've been thinking the thing over from every angle," he said. "There is no other solution that will make for the good of our boy."

Barbara cast up her head in the Langworthy way. She resented the possessive word "our"; she resented the familiarity of "boy."

"Is there anything in the world that I can say to you,

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

Leonard, that will convince you that we are sundered for ever?" she said.

He went on as if he had not heard her. "There is the question of money. You couldn't possibly manage for him as well as I can—no woman could."

"I've plenty of money, Leonard," she said.

She told him of the income which the sale of Rhodes's jewelry had brought her.

"Three thousand a year," he said, slowly. "That is better than I had hoped, of course. But, Barbara, I make ten or twelve thousand a year. Between us we could give the boy everything."

She shook her head sadly. "Not everything, Leonard; not enough."

He knew that the only way he could move her was by some appeal through the boy. She could not now be touched by any need of his own. He looked at her helplessly.

"I don't know what I can say to you," he began.

"There is nothing to say. Don't you see that it's all accident to you, Leonard? Accident that you are a father, accident that Lucia Streeter has left you free to marry—any one? It cannot be that stumbling across my baby and me has really been vital to you. You can't love Gilbert—"

"I've always loved my first-born son," Hare said in a low voice.

Barbara felt sorry for him, almost tender toward him. Looking at him closely, she could see that he had changed. It might be, indeed, that, having lost her, having gone far enough away from the tangle of herself and Helen and Lucia, he had come to view the course of events which he had directed with real shame and contrition. The regret he had expressed to her before their parting had never rung very true; it had seemed largely for himself because he was in an unpleasant and impossible situation. As she looked at him searchingly it struck

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

her that his face was less hard and self-centered than it had been.

Before she could reply callers were ushered across the sward by her little white-capped parlor-maid. Hare rose.

"I will go now, but you must see me again," he muttered.

He hurried down the golden Surrey road, smoking fast, his brow knitted, his eyes fixed. As he entered the little inn where he had taken lodgings he almost collided with a traveler who had evidently just come from the railway station.

"Beg pardon," Hare said; and then, "Thornton!"

He extended his hand. Thornton clasped it briefly. Hare looked at him searchingly. Then he said, half gropingly:

"You've just come?"

"Yes; they were just about to show me my rooms."

"I— May I speak to you?" Hare said, abruptly.

Thornton nodded. Hare followed him and the landlord to a gable-windowed, chintz-furnished room. When they were alone Hare said in a hoarse, staccato voice:

"I've just come from Barbara. I suppose you are going to see her. Not that it's any of my business. I suppose you know our history. I want to marry her again."

"I thought as much when I saw you," Thornton commented.

"There's the boy. She ought to think of him! I don't know how to reach her, Thornton. I don't seem to know her any more."

He looked at Thornton helplessly. What he meant was that never, since the time when, a little boy, he had chosen the lion as his device of strength and will, had he met with any obstacle, any opposition, which he had felt unable to overcome. It was the strange sensation of being thwarted which bewildered Hare.

"You know her so well, Thornton," he went on;

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"you're an older friend than I am. Can't you show her? I'm so deeply mixed up in it that I can't talk to her as an outsider could."

An outsider! Thornton's lip curled in a smile. He was the only one, except the child, who had been close to Barbara during the vital months that had passed—the most vivid part of her life.

Hare went on, oblivious of his own awkwardness: "If I had time I could bring it about, and if I could make her listen. Thornton, if you can put her in the way of listening to me—" He looked rather like a helpless small boy.

Thornton, busied with the straps of a traveling-bag, did not reply for a moment. Then he said, dropping into the medical-school fashion of address, "Doctor, I'm afraid I mustn't interfere."

"But why—but surely," stammered Hare, "surely you agree with me that a father has the right to his son?"

"I can't go into the matter at all," Thornton said, crisply. "Barbara's life is her own to do as she pleases with; her child is her own. She's a strong woman. She will know what it's right to do. I couldn't, for her own sake, interfere."

"For her own sake!" repeated Hare.

He looked at Thornton sharply, a new speculation in his eyes. Never had he thought of Barbara in relation to any other man than himself. She had become a memory in his life rather than a real woman. It was a shock to consider her as having her own world, apart from him—marrying, perhaps—

"But it isn't right," he said, huskily. "The child is mine—"

Thornton spoke without looking at Hare. "I can't go into this," he said; "but Barbara's whole life is centered in the child. From the beginning she has done what she thought was best for him."

Hare remembered Barbara's words of farewell almost a

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

year and a half before: "You are not fit to be a father. The woman who would intrust her child to your bringing up, who would set before it your ideals, would be wronging it." She had judged him then, loving him. How could he expect anything of her now when she had no love for him?

Standing in the English chintz-covered room, Hare judged himself. She was right; they were not mates. He had thought so and had departed from the pitiful mock of their marriage. It was her privilege to build up her life from that wreck, as he had done, and make what refusals she pleased and what choosings she could. His choice had worked pain to her, and then a great happiness; it was but the working-out of an all-too-rare justice that her choice should now be robbing him.

"I—I won't trouble her," he muttered.

He left the room abruptly and a little stumblingly. He found himself, presently, on the road to Barbara's house. Afternoon had died into twilight as he hurried on. When he reached the house he saw that the windows of the drawing-room were bright. He rang, and followed the servant who answered him into Barbara's presence. She was sitting in an arm-chair, playing with Gilbert. She looked up startled, irritated.

"Don't be angry, Barbara," he said, humbly, when the little parlor-maid had gone. "I've come back—I always finish things, you know—I've come back to tell you that I won't trouble you again."

"It will be better so," she said, with lowered eyes.

"But if ever you change, Barbara, only send for me."

"I won't change," she said, and her tone was tense and final.

"I never was good enough for you—or him," he said, heavily.

He stood looking down on the child, who stared back at him unblinkingly.

"He's a beautiful boy," said Hare, with a break in his

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

voice. "I told you once—I wished afterward I hadn't said it, for it hurt—something about holding my first-born in my arms—"

Barbara held out her child. "I'm sorry for you, Leonard," she said. "Take him, if you will—if it won't hurt you afterward. I do pity you, Leonard."

He held the child for a few moments. The boy, frightened at the tense embrace, put out his arms to his mother. Hare pressed his lips to the soft head and gave Gilbert to Barbara. Then, stumbling a little, he left the room quickly. The world had changed for him; a few weeks before he had set out, jauntily enough, upon a tourist's pilgrimage, and he had stepped unawares into the sudden ruins of his house of self.

XXVIII

HOME

WHEN Hare left her Barbara drew a long sigh of relief. He had not the least atom of power over her; she did not feel as if she had ever belonged to him. It was not even embarrassment she felt at seeing him, but only a sense that some importunate stranger was making a preposterous and unsubstantial claim upon her. Now he had gone, and doubtless for ever.

The little parlor-maid came in to draw the blinds, but Barbara prevented her. Rain had begun to fall, and she wanted the light and cheer of her drawing-room to shine out upon whoever might pass. As she so often did, she thought of Thornton. She scarcely expected him yet, and she hoped he would come upon some pale-golden afternoon when she and Gilbert would wait for him under the yellowing trees; and she expected him to telegraph.

Thornton had waited till Hare had returned to the inn. Then he had gone out under the soft rain, forgetful of his umbrella, too eager to see Barbara to think of ordering a cab. He stood on the terrace, watching her and the child playing before the hearth. There was about her no air of expectance, and he divined that Hare had forgotten to tell her of his arrival. She was holding little Gilbert in her arms, shielding his face from the leaping flames, her eyes musing, as if over a vision in which none but she and the child had part. Once more she seemed to him the personification of the spirit of motherhood.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

He opened the long window and came in. She turned her head and smiled, but she did not rise.

"Is it you, Stephen?" she said. "Somehow I didn't expect you to-day; but it's natural, now you're here."

He took her hand and stood looking down over her. "You've not changed, Barbara."

He seemed older and thinner.

"Yes, I know," he nodded; "it takes it out of a man to ride in all weathers and at all hours. My mountaineers prefer my ministrations, it would seem, at three in the morning."

Gilbert held out his arms with a leap of welcome.

"You see, he recognizes you as his own," Barbara laughed.

Thornton took the child and sat beside her. "Well?" he queried.

"Well?" she returned.

A silence, rather embarrassed, fell upon them. They had felt so close through their letters, and now that they were together, perversely enough, they began to realize all that had separated them. Thornton recovered first, and began to tell her the Albemarle County news.

"I didn't write you," he said, "that when it came to the appointing of a guardian for poor Mary Thornton's boy, William Langrel applied, as well as I, but the court appointed me."

"That's something of a vindication, surely, Stephen?" she said, her face glowing.

"I took it so," he replied, "and I expect some of my neighbors will. Not that it really means so much; it just happens that Marshall used his influence with the court. Langrel will live the rest of his life in Albemarle County and never be found out. He's one of those weaklings who exhausted his instinct for criminality in one big coup. I don't care about Langrel, Barbara."

"Just as I don't care about Leonard," she said,

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

She told him of her meeting with Hare. Thornton looked down on Gilbert's little face, and said:

"Poor chap."

"Yes; somehow I felt I shouldn't have the purest right to Gilbert till I could forgive Leonard," Barbara said, naively.

Thornton began to talk to her of Mary Thornton, and Mary's little boy, playing now with Barbara's old toys in Grassmere.

"He's living in your room," Thornton said; "somehow it seemed the youngest place in the house. I had it rehung with Mother Goose paper, and put green matting on the floor, which he is chewing up as rapidly as he can."

"Oh, the matting will be too cold!" Barbara said. "You're not a good mother, Stephen."

They laughed, and little Gilbert chimed in, and then began to whimper, because he was sleepy.

"I must put him to bed, Stephen," Barbara said. "You'll stay to dinner, of course. I'll be back as soon as I can get him asleep."

She carried the baby up-stairs, and fed him, and hushed him to sleep. But the running monologue she carried on, after the fashion of mothers, was a little more mechanical than usual, and her crooning had an absent note. Young Gilbert, however, was not critical. He merely lay in his crib, holding his eyes wide, to show that he had no intention of sleeping, and fixing her with a suspicious stare, in case she should try to slip away from him. When he was asleep she put on a white gown and came down to Thornton. She stood at the door for a moment, watching him as he sat with the firelight playing upon his tired face.

"I haven't asked you if it was a hard journey," she said, approaching him.

"I've been thinking, Barbara," he said, "that all our crises seem to have taken place in stormy weather."

"But we always get out into the sunshine," she answered, sitting beside him.

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

"Barbara," he said, softly, "have I been able to keep it out of my letters that I love you?"

"Yes," she said, gravely.

"It didn't seem fair to tell you so till I could see you," Thornton went on. "I asked myself why I should have come to love you in absence, when I hadn't loved the visible, breathing woman. I've about decided, however, that it's stupid to ask oneself questions about feelings. There's no logic about them. I know this, Barbara, that I love you as I never loved any one before, and that I have always admired you more than I have any one else."

"You—you're sure?" she asked. "You know that Lucia Streeter is free?"

"I know. All that's over long since," he said. "Tell me, Barbara."

"A good deal of the youth has been seared out of me," Barbara said, slowly, "and I am afraid I'll always be more of a mother than anything else. I seem to have skipped girlhood and wifehood."

"I'll bring back youth and wifehood to you," Thornton said.

"Oh, my dear," Barbara cried, "we're talking in such a grave, middle-aged way! Love ought to be so joyous—"

"Like the young lambs that bound as to the tabor's sound?" he smiled. "Our love will be joyous—if you're sure, Barbara."

"Oh, I'm sure!" she said. "I think I've been sure ever since I saw Leonard. But I dared not let myself think much about it. Why, Stephen," she added, with a break in her voice, "what if I had dared let myself think of being with you and Gilbert in Grassmere!"

"There, don't you see how happy we're going to be?" he said. "I've not got much to offer you, Barbara. We'll have to live mostly on the products of Grassmere, for medicine doesn't pay, except spiritually."

"Stephen, you're so good," she murmured. "It will be a noble thing to live with you."

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

Thornton rose. "Come to me, Barbara," he said. "I've had all the nobility and duty I want for a while. So have you. Let us be happy."

He held out his arms and she came to them slowly.

"I'm almost afraid," she whispered; "it can't be real."

"Do you remember," he asked, "when I kissed you as you lay asleep, because you represented all beautiful girlhood to me? Now I want to kiss my woman."

She lifted her face. She had had a shrinking fear that she might think of Hare; she feared her emotional memories. But when Thornton's arms closed about her she remembered only him. She thought of his goodness, his disappointments, his victories, and she felt humble and proud that he loved her. Perhaps it was a sober, middle-aged love that had come to her, but it was a more selfless love than she had given Hare. They two would work together for the two children in Grassmere, for Thornton's mountain patients—and perhaps some day for their own children. That old, out-worn idyl of hers had brought her by a devious route to the best that life could offer.

Then, as Thornton held her close, little thrills of hope and joy ran all through Barbara's veins. No, it wasn't middle-aged love; it was as big and spontaneous as if she were twenty, and far more compelling.

"Stephen," she said, her voice deep and happy—"Stephen, the old red road that I wanted to travel over has brought me back to Grassmere. I've gone over mountains and seas for love's sake, and I have been led home to you."

"You and work and the children," Thornton said.

"The children and you," Barbara said. "Oh, dearest man in the world, we're not middle-aged! We can't be anything but young so long as we have each other."

They sat down, hand in hand, and looked into the firelight, seeing there, each one, a life of service and love. They read a vista of quiet years beside the red road that

BARBARA'S MARRIAGES

led to the mountains—a road that was to be no longer the path to adventure, but the highroad to work. They would grow old, as their neighbors had, but they would rear up young life, which in turn would look upon the red road as beckoning adventure, and they in turn would come back some day to work and home. But Thornton and Barbara would understand and help their children. They looked at each other across the firelight, to be sure that it all was true. Their eyes and their lips spoke the wonder of it. Love had won for his high altar two acolytes, strong of soul and sweet of heart, rich in wisdom and in unchanging faith.



THE END

